PARTISAN REVIEW

JULY-AUGUST, 1951

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The Fountains of Rome

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A Communist and His Ideals

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Edith Wharton and Her New Yorks

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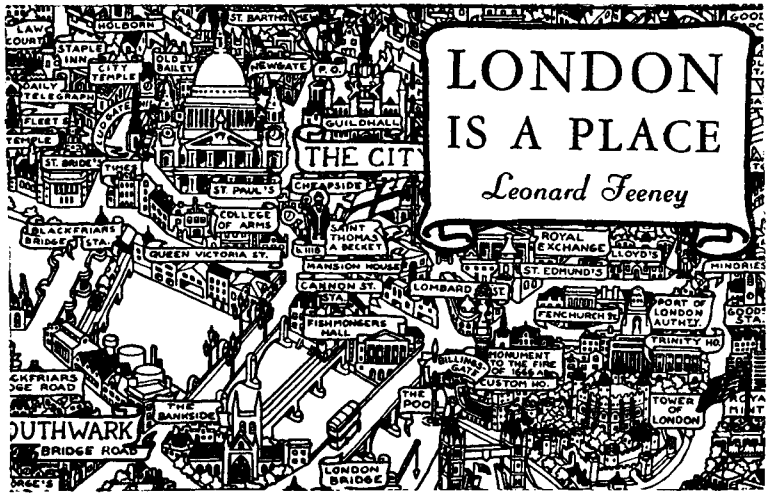

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Eleanor Clark

THE FOUNTAINS OF ROME

You walk close to your dreams. Sometimes it seems that these pulsing crowds, with their daily and yearly rhythms established so long ago none of it has to be decided any more, with their elbows and knees and souls and buttocks touching and rubbing and everybody most pleased and agreeable when it is like that, in a bus for instance, will in another minute all be naked, or will have fish tails or horses' behinds like the characters of the fountains. For the Anglo-Saxon mind, ruled by conscience and the romantic, rigid in its privacies, everything here is shocking—an endless revelation and immersion; this is the vocabulary of our sleep; and the key image is always water.

That is the great assault of Rome, and it is total and terrible. It is really strange that foreigners of the polite centuries always used to wax so romantic about the fountains of Rome, and the music supposed to represent them was such as any young girl could listen to. The truth is, they are extremely indecent, in various ways. Their number is indecent, much as the lives of the Caesars were; common reason expires here; it is of their nature too to make those lives quite ordinary, nothing surprises you beside them. Their settings are apt to be extravagant; they can have sprung up anywhere, be tacked anywhere on the sides of buildings or are themselves a whole house wall; and their details have the candid, smiling sadism of dreams. But the worst is the life around them, and their part in it. They are not only memory, or the living singleness of time, though they are that too and the city would have fallen apart under the weight of its past a long time ago without them; this is easy to see; you notice at once when there is a drought and the fountains become quiet and stale, or empty, how old everything begins to look. But there is another

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unity or community within every single moment to which they are essential, and that is where the real outrage comes.

The romantic, the idealist, the tender-minded of any vein dies a thousand deaths in these fountains; their every dolphin is his nemesis.

The very genius spent on them makes them shocking. They are not *objets d'art* held off from life and treated with respect as they would be anywhere else; there is a closeness, an imminence of touch around them that nothing in our life has except dreams and sex, whence the awful burden on those. They are always being drunk from and splashed in and sat on, everybody dips into them as into his own private memory and quite often they have all kinds of rubbish in their lovely basins, because although the street-cleaners of Rome are many and hard-working they cannot be everywhere at once.

The churches likewise; it is all physical and close; God is not up in any Gothic shadows but to be touched and smelled and fondled, reached into up to the armpit. The Anglo-Saxon, hunting everywhere for French cathedrals, feels his mind threatened like a lump of sugar in a cup of tea.

The spaces are shocking. They are close too, and give no warnings, so that suddenly the Pantheon or the huge volutes of Sant' Ignazio are crowding right over you; you are not allowed to stand off, it seems you are not allowed to admire at all; it is as though a giant mother were squashing you to her breast. Besides those freakish squares and the narrow streets around them, most vividly in the old quarters, Trastevere and all the part between the Corso and the Tiber, do not constitute an *outside* in our sense, but a great rich withinness, an interior, and running water is its open fire. Even a tourist can tell in a Roman street that he is in something and not outside of something as he would be in most cities. In Rome to go out is to go home.

There are no sidewalks in these sections. The walls rise from the cobbles as from lagoons, only people are sitting out all along them, under the laundry which is a drastic exposure in itself, more than for any Kinsey or Gallup, and unless they are playing football they are most often mending something. That is one of three occupations you see anywhere in Europe that are no longer known in America: people walk, they carry, and they mend. Not only women; men are mending too, in thousands of dark bicycle and mattress shops and

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tiny individual foundries opening onto the same streets, and which may be the family's windowless kitchen and bedroom as well. What makes these streets Roman, and not those of any old European city, is the demonic energy that goes into everything, and the divine disregard for any other form of life, especially in the football players; also an element of miracle in the way the motorcycles and other traffic get through, shooting straight from hell, without anyone's changing his expression or pace or direction at all. If a Roman does have to move an inch for your car he looks at you like an affronted emperor; but on the whole American cars are objects of as pure a passion as Romans are capable of. "Oh what a fine machine!" a woman calls out. "When Baffoni comes that'll be for me!" Baffoni is Big Whiskers or Uncle Joe—but it was only a gaiety this time, at the sight of a Buick in her living-room.

The big spaces are distressing too. There is nothing French about them, none of that spacious public elegance of the Place de la Concorde or the views up past the Tuileries. Big Piazza del Popolo, where the great political mass meetings are held among trees and flowing streams and Egyptian lions, was even designed by a Frenchman, but the Roman look soon grew over it, like the weeds and wild flowers in the crevices of its twin churches.

Piazza San Pietro, so splendidly reasonable as architecture, at least until the recent alteration, is not a place for reasonable individuals to stroll with a happy sense of partaking of the achievement and somehow corresponding to it, as they would in such a square in Paris. It is a place for people to congregate in the terrific force of their gregariousness, their mass cravings, like cattle around a water-hole; and when it is empty, when there is no saint being made or other spectacle, it is lifeless: very admirable in its lines but cold, with a hollow look, like the scene of a dream in which after standing with a great crowd one has suddenly been left alone. But then as suddenly you find it filled another way; another sequence has begun. It is a sunny winter afternoon, and now even this enormous space has become a living-room, or public nursery. The Dome, announcing itself for miles around as the center of the world, is actually presiding like a hen over thousands of babies and mothers and lovers and very ancient people strewn all over the steps of Bernini's colonnade and the awesome area it encloses, not as if they owned it

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but really owning it. It is where they live. The fountains, those two high waving flags of world Catholicism, are as local as a barnyard pump. There is no distance; there is no awe of anything.

It is like a party all the time; nobody has to worry about giving one or being invited; it is going on every day in the street and you can go down or be part of it from your window; nobody eats alone in the cafeteria, reading a book. A sick-bed is another public gathering; there is a ritual of moaning, question and response; everybody must crowd in.

Then there are the periodic Big Parties, a great deal older than their present ostensible occasions, dogmas and the names of saints, so old that the tumescence of life they cause seems of an order with the habits of bees and the motions of tides. Everybody knows what to do, none of it is to be decided any more, there is no question of having a good time or not; if that is what you are supposed to be having that day then you are having it. The strolling places are all big with motion; the main sounds are of laughter, easy as waterfalls, and motors, but the machines are not going out of the city unless to the beaches in summer; they are just expressing themselves. The little iron tables or big wooden ones with their scars and rubbings of so many other such days, or in some arbor restaurants the hideous cement ones like cut-rate tombstones, are each a domestic fragment of the one sprawling family affair—the material of the public table is of intimate importance in this form of life, more than a person's own last name; the children are in and out of everything, no distance there; other families, of four, five, six, rumble by packaged into one bulbous organism astride the family vespa; and at the proper hour it is all one mass exodus, to bed.

The honored personage, in any gathering, is the pregnant woman. She is exhibited, she exhibits herself, everyone feels happier and more important if there is someone in that condition at the table; and nothing can be refused her. If you refuse a pregnant woman something she wants you will get a sty in your eye, and her frustrated wishes will appear as blemishes in the child.

It is a deluge. You are in life way over your head, there is no getting out of it, except in the *beaux quartiers* which are not *beaux* at all but only pretentious; taste never functioned here on anything between the hovel and the grand palazzo. There are distances there

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but they are the result of a failure, not a natural way of being. Those sections are always sad and on the big party days, about a dozen a year though some percolate into a season of two or three weeks, seem marked more than ever with the black sign of the sickness of the middle class. The health of the city is elsewhere, around the fountains, where the private soul is in ceaseless disintegration; nothing is held back; the only secrecy is of the city itself.

Of course the fountains are not all for every purpose and time of day; it depends on the space. Piazza del Popolo is a fascinating crossroads, a place to sit awile, but far too big and unprotective really to live in; the little square around the lovely Tortoise Fountain is more like a back stoop. For general all-day use, but especially at *l'ora della passeggiata* and in the evening, two of the best are beautiful Piazza Navona with its three fountains —"godless Navona," the angry reformers of the Middle Ages called it—and the cobbled square of Santa Maria in Trastevere, which is not much less beautiful although only one of its buildings is a true palazzo. But the others are massive and handsome too, of a comfortable height, and have the weathered stucco colors of embers, ochre to rose, darker under the ledges, that are the characteristic ones of the city and help to give the walls their mysterious organic relation to people, nothing one could think of clearing away in a hurry. The main beauty of the piazza, as of most of the others, is that in spite of its superb proportions it seems not to have been planned but to have come about as a widening in a cow-path does, so that nobody has that unpleasant feeling of doing what is expected of them, though in fact they are doing in nearly every detail what has been done in the same place for a great many generations. The fountain here is large and central, as it needs to be. It is not a sculptured one but a high impersonal form, a real flowing goblet, chattery but serene, which both fosters and absolves all the immense amount of *being,* being then and there, not waiting, not conceiving or imagining, that goes on around it. All water has an aspect of holy water; you feel it most strongly in these unfigured basins, not shooting up great rousing banners of liquid light as at St. Peter's but the stiller ones, especially where life is so thick around them. The main feeling around this one is of a perpetual dream-like wiping out of experience; continuity is all in the water.

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The church is essential in the same way. It was the first one dedicated to Mary and has kept the modest, authentic dignity of its great age beneath its tatters and strange accretions—or not so strange: there has been no serious change since the twelfth century square tower and mosaic across the façade. It gives the square its deep subtlety of color and line, and is part of its other spaciousness too, along with the moving water, and as a view of the mountains would be.

The place itself is voyage; that is why there is no restlessness. Neither is there anything for the tender heart, neither pity nor self-pity; for the delicate sensibility it is all scandal and continual death.

The most startling people are the children; no other Italians have quite that look. These are the boys painted by Caravaggio, with all the tough seductive wisdom of the city, the toying challenge miles beyond any illusion, in their eyes; painted sometimes, in their careless open shirts, as child saints, when all their sublimity is of the rock bottom. They have been spared nothing, nobody ever changed the subject when they came into the room; by the age of seven it seems there is no human temptation or degradation they have not walked through the boiling center of, no vice they have not made up their own minds about, and they can have the manners of mule-drivers or cardinals as they happen to choose; only they cannot dissemble; they have the appalling candor of all Rome, and when you see it in a child's face you do not know if you are looking at fish or at angels. You see something else in their eyes; it is themselves as very old men, then their children and great-grandchildren standing before you at the age of seven and of seventy or a hundred, all with the same two huge eyeballs looking at you in what might be a smile.

The wonder, you might think, is that their fathers can be so childish. The rages of these men are marvelous. A vespa brushes with a filobus and immediately the two drivers are at each other as if there had been a feud between their families for years. "HOO! LA! HO!" *"Ignorante!" "Fesso!" "Coglione!"* They gesticulate, point to their steering-wheels and fenders, bring the city to witness; the buses run from overhead wires so soon twenty are held up. The owner of the vespa in his fury gets his front wheel stuck sideways and the motor going full speed makes the machine buck like a wild horse; so the bus moves on but he catches up with it a block later,

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plants himself square in front of it and begins shouting again. The scene is mandatory, if you were in the wrong it is even more necessary to make out that you were not; and inside the bus everyone is pleased, more than they were already at being transported like a shipment of eels; they would have been cheated if one of the drivers had not played his part. The most relaxed-looking people in Rome are the bus conductors, patrons all day of a kind of party that puts the public at its best and wittiest, because the lack is not of sensibility, only of nerves. The Roman form of serenade is to race a motorcycle motor under the girl's window, but mufflers are not common in any situation; the only things as dearly loved as a good noise are breakneck speed and eye-splitting lights, preferably neon—all expressions of well-being, like a huge belly-laugh.

The women are of the species. Foreign men who take up with them or try to are nearly dashed to pieces, which in these days is a common attraction. With their dumpy graceless bodies and an air of the empire about their beautiful heads and shoulders, their faces not marred but somehow made more personal and approachable by the extraordinary frequency of wens on them, these Roman women move in the blazing noon of a terrible cold sensuality, that can kill because it is so truly gay. They are said to be the coldest women in Europe but they are probably also the most candid; they are no more nebulous than the sky above them, and seem incapable of the least affectation; and they lose not an atom of their tremendous inner conviction because their calculations have brought them to a prospect of doing the washing for the next fifty years under an image of the Madonna. Their power even takes on another depth of joyousness once that is settled. The drive of femininity, which is of the whole being and so just the opposite of nymphomania, never gives out; neither does the lung power; their voices carry like V2's across the square and in all the streets around, in a frenzy of anger you would suppose but it may be only to ask the time and in a moment will be as loud with laughter. With their children it is a torrent treatment that may go on for thirty years, or never stop, of huggings and slappings and spoiling and tyrannical ordering about. The American, reflecting on his own childhood, feels exposed as to a break in Boulder Dam.

The guitar player at one of the two restaurants there on the

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square, in the aura of the venerable church, is something worse than shocking; it is because of the church, and the fountain, that he can be.

The restaurant has become rather fancy lately and the two musicians, who are the most talented of the kind in the city, size up their little audiences with a brutal shrewdness that could be mistaken for ridicule. Those knowledgeable children, after all, have not lost anything in growing up; these men know what they are doing, and for tourists they will play the worst of the Neapolitan repertoire as soulfully as anybody else. The guitar player, who sings, brings a look of longing into his big dark eyes, set in a leathery egg-shaped face, broadest at the bottom of the cheeks, which for those five minutes is all wistfully racked by the incapacity of any human art to express such beauty as the heart perceives; the beauty of the lady at the table is also too much; if he rested his eyes on hers for more than the duration of one yearning middle G he would have to stop singing entirely; when business is brisk he may have to be overcome by such sorrow twenty or thirty times in an evening, while the violinist, who is taller and wears glasses, keeps expressionless and a little in the rear, knowing that his face—this is *his* sorrow—is more suited to a comedian, and not wanting it to intrude on so touching a performance. The only thing is that their little routine bow at the end, acknowledgment of the guest's superior station and extreme kindness in listening to them, never gets quite finished; they had already moved on when they started it.

Their real songs, and any Roman's, are the long obscene *stornelli,* ballads with a Moorish twist and many verses rising in detail as they go on. One is about the prison of Regina Coeli—nobody is a true Roman who has not been there, the song says, but that is only the beginning. One is about the fountain at Piazza Esedra where the bronze naked ladies are kicking up their heels while the man at the center wrestles with a dolphin: *"Oh what is he doing with that big fish. . . ."* A recent one has to do with Holy Year: *"I sin all the year round, now I am making up my accounts for l'anno santo. . . ."* *Santo* goes into a dozen or fifteen syllables, a long spiraling, leering, eye-rolling cadenza as coarse as any of the items that follow; the violinist is not retiring at all now; his big comedian's face is all crackling with obscene suggestion and the moaning of the

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strings has turned to a sly slithering and biting more skillfully dirty than any of the verses; and after this song the singer will have to get out his handkerchief though his forehead was dry enough after the sad ones, at which he seemed to be working so. But this is an act too and will not make you friends with them, though sporadically, depending on business and the sirocco, they may pretend so; friendship is an alien idea; sooner or later your feelings are going to get hurt, and then suddenly it appears that all this time you had not been where you thought at all, among the roots of your own memory, but in China. It is an oriental city.

The spaghetti and the beads hanging in the doors to keep the flies out, the guttural singing notes and sudden rests of Roman speech are Chinese; the reverence for parents, the bright-colored swarming streets, the easy talk of death; there is nothing here that you will ever understand.

In the cheaper cafés and wine-shops off the piazza there is a commotion of domestic gatherings all mixed with undercover operations of every kind, sexual, commercial; counterfeiters, pickpockets, and the lower depths of the sports and lottery worlds. There are plenty of ways of getting into that typically named place Regina Coeli, but the murders of Rome, now that official fascist murder is over, are nearly always of passion, and usually in the family. Considering the habits of the rulers for so long it is peculiar. Perhaps it is only that serious gangsterism would be too much like working for an idea and Romans care too much for their skins, but perhaps it is also because of the purity of the water they drink and see everywhere around them, water being the element of miracle and ultimate innocence, so that the wickeder they are the more they are only foundering in a state of grace. There is not even a concept of crime and so there has never been any detective fiction, it would not make sense; if a criminal is any good he is a *bravo,* a hero, but the really good ones never do come from Rome.

This is terrible; it makes for a terrible familiarity with holiness; you can treat it like a dog.

You can hear young men in these *trattorie* saying obscene black masses, sitting under the crowded little bunch of flowers and tiny electric bulb of the shop shrine or the shrine in the street, droning and chanting in excellent mimicry a liturgy of Roman four-letter

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words, and other customers will treat them to wine to hear it again. Italians from any other city speak of them as the scum of the earth.

Then they go off across the piazza, eight or ten of them, with their arms around each other and one perhaps with a guitar, and may pair off in the dark or be going to meet their fiancées or both, or there may be more interesting possibilities, princes or diplomats hunting in the quarter. On one excursion of the kind a Trastevere boy went along gladly enough, until he looked around his companion's fashionable bedroom. *"Macche!"* he said. "Are you a Turk? You have no picture of the Madonna here!"

The unmarried girls are on the whole still rather careful; the ones who are not write their telephone numbers on five and ten thousand lire bills; and here enters Dr. Strom, although there is more than one way of looking at him.

There are in fact two Dr. Stroms, Dr. Alfredo and Dr. David, specialists in venereal diseases, "sexual anomalies" and most conspicuously impotence, and in point of public notice they are by far the most outstanding men in the city. They advertise every day in the best newspapers, also on big signs set in the sidewalk beside all the important bus-stops; the space must be rented by the city. There are many other such ads in the papers and scribbled in chalk on the insides of urinals; a recent one of those read "Better Hell than Impotence" and had along with the doctor's address a picture of a devil with a pitchfork; and there is one "sexologist" who advertises only in the Communist paper; but none can compete with the great two-headed Dr. Strom. The only question is whether he really exists, and if he does, how he can make a living. However you take him, it is more of that blurting out; romance is impossible.

The very old are shocking. They are not left out, any more than criminals, there is no conception of an outside for them to be out in; the great living-room with its flower and chestnut stands and shade or sun for summer or winter is theirs too, the fountains flow for them. It makes no difference how poor or sick or useless or disagreeable they are. The Eskimos on the other hand are said to take their old out and abandon them on the ice, with their own consent, and in America many of our best sociologists are working on this problem.

The beggars are worse. There are thousands of them as there always were, some with rented children smeared up for the job,

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some who are half dead and ought to be in institutions, some who are perfectly able-bodied and have simply chosen that profession, and it is very rare for Romans not to give to them, at least a few times every day. They do not give out of kindness or because anyone is deserving, there is no buying of conscience in it, they just give; it is another kind of flowing out, and if the beggars were properly taken care of, as has been tried sometimes, everybody would feel that a natural outlet had been blocked and they had been somehow shut back in themselves; it would be as if something had gone wrong with their speech, or one of the big fountains were dry. There is no more outlandish sight in Rome than an American refusing a beggar.

The trouble is, it is very kind, this flowing ritualized amoral and unromantic community, which did not have to learn not to judge one's neighbor; it seems never to have heard of the idea; and in which individual kindness is unnecessary and practically unheard-of—what looks like it is often just genuine enjoyment of other people's business. That is what is upsetting, it makes social improvement so difficult; there is not much room for busybodies or any false charity. The beggars know that their work has that profound use and dignity and would howl with derision at a Swede who tried to put them in an institution, but the Swede and the Swiss are the great comic types in Rome anyway. Better Hell, or a home in the Tarpeian caves and a dog's bowl at noon at the back door of the monastery, than to be out of the big swim.

The urinals are shocking.

Go up the hill from Trastevere and sit at the Bar Gianicolo, across from the papal walls and the Porta San Pancrazio; that is the newest and dumpiest of the city gates, a petty-bourgeois triumphal arch in stucco, still it marks an exit, and you are really in the country there; the bar is a village bar; the vegetation is thick and casual: trees, an arbor to sit under in summer, wisteria and azaleas falling from the roof, capers and other shrubbery in the city wall. But this can happen inside the walls too; it is another mysterious kindness of the city that for all its staggering recent growth and harsh new sections like the one that begins a few blocks from here, in a few minutes from almost anywhere you can be in a country place, not parks, nothing kept up or planned, but real ones; real country

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lanes running between high uneven overgrown walls, with donkeys and troughs and bits of ruins left to themselves, and rough little eating places in a profusion of birds and greenery. There is no word for weekend; it is not necessary; you may want to get away from this city sometimes but you would never think of needing to get *out* of it.

Here across from the gate, also from an iron gate leading to Garibaldi on his horse—on the Passeggiata del Gianicolo—there is no fountain, only a spigot from a kind of hydrant that spills night and day into an old wooden tub and eventually down a drain. But there is another water aspect. Along the old road to the north that starts from here, the Via Aurelia Antica, that drowsy sunken lane that leads you out of the city as from a secret garden that you have come on by accident and will probably never find again, runs the acqueduct begun by Augustus to bring the water in from Lake Bracciano, and called at different times the Alsietina and the Traiana; then in the Renaissance when all the spigots and faucets began being turned on again it became the Acqua Paola, after the Pope whose arch straddles the road with that charming Roman air of having a purpose, where none is visible or imaginable. The water, which is chalky and the least good of the Roman waters for drinking—but there is as much rivalry about them as over qualities of diamonds in a mining town and you never know whom to believe—runs in pipes under the road now, so the only practical use of the old arches is to frame one of the nicest views of the Dome: just beyond the Pope's gateway it appears as a huge inverted and stemless egg-cup resting lightly on a field of cabbages.

This acqueduct has not the grand haunting broken stride of the ones across the campagna. It stays close beside you all the way, familiar, the arches becoming gradually filled in and finally just fading out into a farmyard fence; but like the others it gives you an image of what the city's true defenses always were: not walls, Servian, Aurelian, papal or economic, but running water and the mind's need of it; no army was ever as strong as that.

However it has other functions too and so there have to be urinals, otherwise people would relieve themselves anywhere as they do of their feelings and as the children do. The café proprietor's grandson Rodolfo makes himself an object of delighted attention in the piazza because he has to go so often. "Why he's a regular little

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faucet!" his pretty mother says with hilarious gaiety, addressing everyone at the three or four tables outside the bar. "He's been five times this afternoon and I've only been once. . . . All right, but go behind the bush. Oh, look at him, he's doing it right here! *Five times!*" She goes off in peals of laughter, doubling over the table with it, and everyone falls in with her pride and humor; Rodolfo beams, finishing; naturally he is spoiled, being such a *wunderkind.*

The urinal here is the handsome kind with two compartments and the screens coming pretty well around, not one of the cheaper little open niches of the less important streets, where in any case just as much use is made of the corners provided by the irregularities of the buildings. It is right in front of the café, beside the hydrant and tub, where people stop to drink and bring their bottles to fill all day, so that especially on holidays there are two waiting lines or shifting social gatherings mingled there. It is the corner spa, one part of it for men only—indicating a certain archaism in this society, but that is deceptive; if there were any exclusion beyond mere convenience the men would button their flies inside the screen and not as they stroll away across the piazza. It is the whole cycle, natural and manifest as pregnancy or the flow of historical time; and this is happening all over the city, in combination with hundreds of fountains that are not just a public faucet like this one but designed in a spirit as of the greatest cathedrals, if you could speak of such a thing as a cathedral here. The waters themselves so beautiful, even the less good ones being incredibly limpid, with no suggestion of transit, none of that half dead look of most city water—all the millions of gallons of it seem to be springing just that instant from virgin earth—are among other things continually working their way, mixed with various quantities of wine, through every single intestinal and urinal tract in the human conglomeration, and thence eventually in their new chemical form out the great and equally visible end-hole of the Cloaca Maxima, that anal opening on the Tiber which is pointed to with such intimate affection because it has been discharging the same substances as now for some twenty-five hundred years, and some excretion from every person's body in all that time had to go through it. It seems that past generations would moan and a million and a half living people would start having gastric pains all together if it were blocked up.

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There could never, of course, be fairy stories in such a place, any more than ghost stories; there never have been in the country but they would be particularly *de trop* in Rome. The Nordic soul misses its yearnings and regrets. Here in the dazzle of physical facts it detects a ghastly blank, in which there resounds endlessly that terrible word *pazienza,* applying to all calamities and inconveniences of whatever degree and meaning not patience at all but an attitude as toward the facts of astronomy. That is the strange gaiety and relaxation of the piazza; only you, the alien, ever conceived of happiness; the assumptions in every one of those heads would make any of your compatriots commit suicide. The absence of friendship can appall you there too, more than when you suffer from it; it is all bump and flow, meet and good-by, unless there is some motive for maintenance or ritual continuity, but the heart is all in the moment; the lasting, loyal heart is the one compounded from all their little ones, as Dr. Strom is from their fears.

The priests and monks and nuns are shocking: what is this vast population feeding at the expense of the other? So are all their expensive new houses going up on the Janiculum where they already have dozens, while the poor are still in caves and huts in the dumps, having to throw their droppings together with their garbage out the door. All those men and boys in their long skirts always seem to be walking on revolving paddles like little steamboats; and how pleased they are; it is only in the faces of the nuns that you see signs sometimes of great suffering.

There they all go, between the spa and the Bar Gianicolo, down over the hill into the fat arms of Mother Church, above which the Dome, the *cupolone* Romans call it, sits like a Paris hat. This road is the main artery between it and many of their houses, which are all the same—tasteless elaborate villas of which the only beauty is the flowers; the architecture is on a par with modern church music and the neon crosses that are going up everywhere now—and so there are processions of them all the time, of all ages and costumes and prattling in all the world's languages: the Germans most vain in their scarlet, others with purple sashes, Negro Jesuits from Africa, Chinese, intense young Dutchmen, Boston Irish not yet used to the soutane, cold-toed Capucins in brown, Passionists with the heart of Jesus usually a little crooked over their own. It is like a satire of the waterfront

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of Marseilles; Rome is their port, and as long as they are together you would not think they could ever be touched by that other life thronging around them all along the beautiful ridge of the Passeggiata. It is an element; they just paddle through it; and may well, being pensionnaires of the greatest real estate firm in Europe. In return they provide a spectacle, a note of variation in the scene, and Romans will support anything for that. Their main hold, as a city sight, is as a tremendous sexual image in reverse, which would be sorely missed; even the smaller groups, and most noticeably ones of adolescent boys with tonsures, always leave a special animal exhilaration in their wake.

You can see another kind of procession here sometimes, aside from the permanent one of Garibaldi's soldiers in marble busts among the trees, down by the lighthouse. The young Communists, because of that heroic association of a hundred years ago, tend to hold their parades and meetings in the neighborhood, and afterwards drift about with a sullen, surprised look, all ready to pull some big handle like a brakeman's switch that will change everything and not seeming to find it in the piazza. If an American makes the mistake of being friendly to one of them in that mood he is liable to get insulted; you can tell them from the young fascists by whom they pick on.

At the café there is a subtler play of differences, the proprietor and his sons, all good fascists once, now of the right-wing Liberals, having rather more incentive than the Senate and Chamber of Deputies to play up the common denominator. There is the Royalist hobo who sleeps across the road in the gate and for a free glass of wine will tell tall tales of his courage in fighting Communists; the scowling fascist lawyer who explains the newspaper every afternoon to anyone who will listen—he seems for some reason to have no family; the Communist masons building the new monastery down the road eat their lunch under the arbor. There are the usual café "characters" too: the starving barefoot young man with black hair to his shoulders and a briefcase, who gave away an inheritance last year and thinks he is Christ; the old prince who comes up from downtown every afternoon and holds court at one of the rickety tables, leaving his car and chauffeur twenty yards down the street. But it is hard for eccentrics to be of much interest in Rome; they would be more talked about if they had kidney trouble instead.

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At election times the walls are all painted with slogans and rival posters climb higher and higher on the gate. For the great election of 1948 many of the best of them, as well as the leaflets that floated down through the trees from planes and other stunts that may have swung the tide, were the work of an American publicity man hired late in the game by the Demo-Christians and who called himself the King of Contacts. It is touching; nobody had ever heard of him before, hardly anyone knew his real name then; like a mysterious knight of old, or Castor and Pollux at the Battle of Lake Regillus, he won that great victory practically single-handed, then quietly disappeared, and perhaps now in countries far away mothers are soothing their children as they listen to the leaflets flitting against their window-panes in the storm: "Ssh my darling, sleep; the King is watching over us. . . ." Here at that time a priest or two was slightly mauled in the piazza, and as before any election there was huffiness and occasional fur flying at the café. Then the day after the vote, although the wall-writing never stops, the posters are scraped off here and everywhere, so that for a few hours the whole city is knee-deep in wet paper, which shortly ends up like all other good things in the ancestral sewer, and life goes back to its *pazienza* and its regular rhythms and its regular gas, electricity and public transportation strikes whose purpose nobody attempts to divine.

The real common denominator of the section, and in a sense of the whole city because it is high over all of it like a shrine and the eye rises to it from almost everywhere, is just out of sight of the piazza, but the sense of it enfolds all the life there; everything would be more brittle without it.

This is not the Dome. It is the Fontana Paola, built to show off the new water brought in when Pope Paul V fixed up the old acqueduct down the road—the same water that provides that very different appeal in front of St. Peter's and also supplies most of Trastevere. The fountain is often criticized as architecture; its curves are thought to be heavy and its proportions bad; its griffins and eagles are perhaps rather spikey for its sensuous lines, too much like gargoyles. But in the particular case this is caviling. It is not exactly that the building suggests a church, any more than a centaur suggests a horse; it is one; its typical baroque church façade, from

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which three torrents of water gush out into the large and similarly curving basin, belongs to it honestly; faith and the dream have assumed one image, in which the orphans next door do their washing and through whose three gaping frames, the church doors, you see an incongruous house wall and a collection of carpenter's rubbish, and nothing else could so properly stand over that landscape. The popes knew what they were doing when they engraved themselves as most of them did on fountains; for the mind bred on tension and principle nothing could be so disturbing.

But this is at the rim, up a way from the thick of things. It is in Pasquin's district, down across the Tiber in the neighborhood of another great fountain, that you find the truest Romans, though some will tell you that none are left in that category but the statue-wits Pasquin, Marforio and The Foot. "*Noialtri siamo dei fessi.* All the rest of us are horses' asses." The central fountain of this district is Bernini's one of the four rivers in Piazza Navona. Many of the streets around are named for guilds; they are of the butchers, the bakers, and so on, and at the *trattorie* you are likely to come on a tableful of carpenters or iron-workers having their evening wine. A peculiar thing is how often they are talking about Rome and themselves its inhabitants, in those terms; *i romani, noialtri romani* are like this or that, behave this way or that; there never was a city at the same time so unexclusive and so fascinated by its own character, although if it were threatened like Paris at the Marne it is hard to imagine that many Romans would willingly give up their motorcycles to help defend it. It would not seem very vital, and by the same token the recent German occupation, which was as vicious as anywhere else though in some ways no more galling than the French ones of the last century, has left no sense of human breakage, none of that cracking and splintering that occurred in some places; and so the city was saved better than most after all; there were not even many collaborationists; it must have been maddening, more than Horatio to Lars Porsena.

The most conspicuous public character in the quarter is a woman—a newspaper vendor named Carolina. It may be that the real power is another woman, her friend, who runs a small café-restaurant on a much more secretive little piazza, triangular and hilly, back of Navona. This woman is massive in every way, having some

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malady that has turned her legs to two barrels and in her strikingly handsome face a power as of dynasties, and it is said that she does reign over the section, arranging contracts and marriages and so forth; to look at her she may well arrange consent or rebellion in larger matters too and would not be anything for a tyrant to trifle with except in his last panic. She is a whole other government, benevolent it would seem, but incontrovertible. At closing time, long after midnight, she moves slowly out across the cobbles on her inadequate little feet, on the arm of a son or nephew, her imperial head having no need of a basket of washing to keep it high, turning once at the top of the square to acknowledge some last remark from the attendants taking in the last tables. At other times she must be capable of tremendous laughter; just now there is no occasion for it; her regard, in which there could never be anything so undependable as pity, rests a moment on the scene much as it did a little earlier when the children were playing there; she murmurs good-night again, not needing to commit anything of herself in that banality, which however she would not omit; then with another word to her companion to set them in motion again, as though a cortege were falling in behind, goes off down the flickering crooked street that is one of the corridors of her palace.

Carolina is of different material. She is not even the Prime Minister but more a scout and buffoon, who operates out in the larger world, her occupation giving her contacts with most of the dignitaries who come into the quarter. She is the everyday link between the *rione* or district and the government, also the United States, Brazil, the movie industry, etc., and there is probably no diplomatic job in Rome more strenuous. Everyone knows her, she knows everyone; the better outdoor restaurants are her beat; if she sees glancing at a certain table that she has gone too far she will immediately pretend to be drunk, or silly, and begin talking about love. It is convincing because quite often she is really drunk. Even so she is very skillful in her improvisations of headlines that are never entirely absurd, although the main effect of them, always funny, is just to make hash of all public affairs. But there can be something of Pasquin's point in them too, especially on his original subject, the Vatican, which the present pious government has brought to the front again; the ministries are called monasteries, the Monastery of Foreign Affairs and so

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on; the name of Mussolini's mistress has had a letter added—De Gasperi's, they say, is named *Pretacci,* rotten priests. But Carolina is first of all an actress.

"All priests ordered to take wives!" she calls waving a paper over the potted-hedge railing of the restaurant. "All priests must marry by Monday!" "The Chinese take Rome!"—meaning Americans; or she may be only making fun of all war. "Giuliano takes over the government!" "Scelba drowns in the Tiber! Terrible misfortune! The Minister of the Interior is dead!" At a table of her better acquaintances she will stop to toss off a glass of wine, standing, and make longer recitations, in a mumble if they are risky, or loud enough to be heard all around, though she has the great gift of not eyeing her audiences; they always think she is talking for herself. Then she moves on stolid and thumping on her heels through the crazy streets, as though wearing a tiara of cabbages, to cry her crazy wares somewhere else. It is impossible to think of her growing old or having ever been young, and surely she was there once shouting: "Tarquin is sick!" "Nero gives birth to a frog!" "The Pope chased out of Avignon! Everybody out to welcome the Pope!"

She is the best Roman comedian of the present time; the only one in the theaters who is better is a Neapolitan and he is not concerned with politics. Besides she is making it all up, with only a hint of a gleam in her tough fifty-year-old gamin face, as handsome as her queenly friend's, but round and wicked, with a texture like an earthenware jug; and she is a power too; nothing will ever shut her up, though she might have to run a pushcart again as she did under fascism instead of selling papers. "If I had only learned to behave myself," she says. "That's the way to be rich and strong. I never could behave myself."

But she can improvise just as well on life in general, and her own life, and in one way she certainly outdoes the great Neapolitan, Eduardo de Filippo, who is sometimes guilty of a real tear over romance, and death. Carolina's act stays pure to the end; her nearest approach to a real tear is because she has been sick recently and is not supposed to drink any more, but this is fabricated too, she will do as she likes anyway. Around the time her friend is going home she can finally sit down at a corner table of the café in Piazza Navona, where they will serve her something free at that hour—it

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is one of the best cafés—and if there is nothing better to do she will advise young people to be happily married. Herself, so she says, she has had four husbands and been in love other times too but she never found, she says looking at you in her bold blank ingenuous way, the word coming right along, the ideal; she would always discover some horrible thing and it would be finished. The last one was the director of "my paper." She believed in him, and he was taking care of her, but then she found out horrible things and it made her sick, that's why she had to go away to the cure for four months. She was eating her heart out; so Roberto Rossellini who knew all about it went and spoke to the director, and he was really sorry, but still there were those horrible things she had learned. True love was what she had wanted; she has never found the ideal.

Out in the empty piazza two of Bernini's bold white river figures catch the light, one with his hand up in comic horror, the other hiding his head; the fountain's obelisk finishes in shadow, you can hear the water trickling over the marble snake and marine centaur beneath. Carolina is looking at you with wicked wide-eyed innocence; you are supposed to be moved by these confidences; she would not have been happy to end the day with a poor performance. At last she finishes her coffee, gathers up her few unsold papers, faces the sinister gleam of the piazza like someone setting out alone at night across an ocean. *"Non ho mai trovato l'ideale."*

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TWO DECLARATIONS BY ANDRÉ GIDE

(With introductory notes by Justin O'Brien)

Early this year, less than a month before his death, André Gide received two letters from abroad soliciting his opinion on questions of urgent and international interest. It had long been customary for intellectuals all over the world to turn to Gide for guidance in the problems that beset us all, until, during the last ten years of his life, he was submerged under an avalanche of mail. Only by a constant exercise of the will was he able to reserve essential time for the creative writing on which he was engaged up to the end. Yet the two appeals of January 1951 seemed to him, for different reasons, to justify interrupting his work in order to reply with a declaration of principles.

The first letter came from Tokyo and bore the signature of a Japanese scholar and writer, Mitsuo Nakamura. It began with the statement that Japan is a country outside the circle of Gide's interests and the assumption that "Your impression of Japan at present must be the one left you by the war and you would like, if possible, to see that very country erased from the surface of the globe together with that painful impression." But the fact remains, says the writer, that André Gide has exerted and continues to exert the greatest influence over the youth of Japan, where no native writer enjoys such widespread prestige. His works have been known in Japan since 1920, and as early as 1933 (when the French were just beginning to issue his "Complete Works") a twenty-volume translation was published in Tokyo; today a new edition, brought up to date by the inclusion of Gide's recent writings, is beginning to appear simultaneously with a complete translation of his "Journals." Such are the facts which embolden Mr. Nakamura to ask André Gide certain questions in the name of Japanese youth.

His questions are based on the belief that "The value of European culture lies in its universality, its humanity. These qualities aroused the desires and active powers of all humanity and wherever humanity

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strove for a better condition of life it was forced to adopt the ideals offered by European culture. And indeed that culture strikes us today as having spread to the point of becoming the culture of the world. But at the same time, living as we do on the edge of the Orient and yet surrounded by the products of European culture, it seems to us that those products have lost the life they must have had in the beginning and assumed abstract qualities that are altogether inhuman. The tyranny of machines produces a marvelous change in the externals of human life but exerts merely a destructive influence as to the heart of that life. The tyranny of machines day by day further limits man's ability to live according to his inner code, deprives him of that moral backbone, and forces him to live in conformity with rules imposed from the outside. . . . We believe that, since the Renaissance at least, a strong current of non-conformism can be found at the basis of the European spirit. The resultant culture seems to us to have been formed by a small number of individuals who relied upon no one but themselves, who looked at everything with their own eyes, felt with their own hearts and sought out unflinchingly the possibilities of their own selves—and by an intelligent public capable of appreciating them, always, to be sure, after a certain interval. But the fusion of conformism with the tyranny of machines which is spreading over the entire world today is nothing but the contrary of this characteristic of European culture. This barbarous fusion is dividing the world of the present into two groups of very powerful States, one of which is dominating our life and the other threatening us."

In the light of these conclusions, Mr. Nakamura asks André Gide: "How is *man* to behave on the eve of the conquest of the world by the union of conformism with machines?" And he adds, "Faced as we are by the destruction of the entire human race, it seems to us that the redemption of the soul, that is the achievement of *man's happiness,* is the primary question, superseding all military and political prognoses."

André Gide's reply to this unexpected and challenging letter follows:

Paris, 2 January 1951

Dear Mitsuo Nakamura,

Your long and excellent letter of 29 November reached me yesterday. The details you furnish as to the popularity of my books in Japan, as to the attention granted my writings by a people with whom I did not think any moral and intellectual common ground could be hoped for, could be possible, bring me joy; for now you

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convince me, with ample evidence, that such a common ground definitely exists. Yet I must confess that this great joy is accompanied by a most serious feeling not far removed from anguish: the feeling of responsibility. You are certainly right in stating that our culture is the very result of a struggle of non-conformism against the gregarious instincts of humanity, the result of the triumph (sooner or later, but often how painfully slow in coming) of a few individuals "who relied solely on themselves, who looked at everything with their own eyes, felt with their own hearts, and sought out unflinchingly the possibilities of their own selves." You quite correctly add: "and an intelligent public capable of appreciating them, always, to be sure, after a certain interval." This is just what made me say, as a conclusion to a recent lecture (given in Brussels and later in Lebanon): "The world will be saved by a few."

When it is a matter of *revealed* truth, the line of behavior is simple: one has only to listen, to submit, to follow, whatever may be the dogma. This was, this still is the slogan of fascism in any country whatever: *"Credere, Obbedire, Combattere."* I have seen the walls in Italy plastered with posters repeating this slogan. We have seen to what wholesale slaughter this doctrine led entire nations. And we have not ceased to see such things. But it is so easy, so comfortable to provide the unthinking masses, the vast majority of men, with such apparently altogether unselfish reasons for sacrificing themselves. The least interrogation seems impious that urges man to raise his head and ask, even of himself: "Believe in *what?* Obey *whom?* Fight *what?*" And yet the salvation of each one among us (and of each nation) lies in interrogation, in skepticism. To speak frankly, I fear that for a long time all such refusals to conform will be dominated by force and that everything that constituted our culture (which, as I see from your letter, is yours also, so that today one can speak much more generally than one dared do even yesterday), that *human culture* is in great danger.

Alas, I am too old and too weary to reply as fully and as explicitly as I should like to the anxious questions of your letter. I once wrote, I don't recall just where but it was many years ago: "We are like unto one who, to light his way, is following a torch that he himself is carrying." That image, even today, strikes me as excellent, for it contains its own criticism: it does not attempt to hide the

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fact that individualism necessarily involves an element of imprudence. Yet it is to individualism that I cling, in individualism that I see a hope of salvation. For though I am greatly embarrassed to say definitely toward what I am heading and what I want, at least I can declare with certainty what I cannot submit to accepting and what I protest against: and that is falsehood. I believe that we run the risk of dying stifled by falsehood, whether it come from the right or from the left, whether it be political in nature or religious, and I add: whether one use it toward others or toward oneself, and in the latter case often almost unconsciously. I believe that hatred of falsehood offers us a solid foundation, a sort of rampart or platform on which we must be able to meet and come to agreement. What I am saying probably seems simple but it appears to me of great importance, as it appeared to Descartes. I see in this an entire program and a possibility of salvation. In any country whatever, and under any regime whatever, the free man (even were he in chains), the man I am, the man I mean to be—and worthy of understanding you—is the one who does not take things at face value and who accepts as certain only what he has been able to verify.

ANDRE GIDE

The second appeal came from Venice under the letterhead of the Società Europea di Cultura and was signed by Umberto Campagnolo, general secretary of the society. In it Mr. Campagnolo asked André Gide to contribute to the third number of the society's review *Comprendre,* of which he outlined the theme in these terms: "While social and political tension is constantly increasing, there is a tendency on both sides to oppose, in a spirit of reciprocal refusal and condemnation, Western Europe and Eastern Europe, capitalism and collectivism, Christianity and Marxism, "idealistic" philosophy and the philosophy of "praxis," as if two civilizations, two worlds, were confronting one another, one of which supposes the disappearance of the other. The basis for this opinion which, without suspecting the complexity and seriousness of all it implies, tends to spread as if it were an accepted fact, has never been solidly established. Without excluding the existence of certain reasons which might explain that attitude, we think this is a problem which—not only for theoretical considerations but also because of the danger it involves—requires all our attention. It seems to us possible to assert that, far from being faced with irreconcilable anti-

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nomies, we are rather confronted, in each case, with two aspects of a single civilization, with two moments of its development, with two historical expressions of one and the same ethical, cultural, and social reality."

André Gide sent off his reply within a day or two of receiving the letter from Venice:

Paris, 28 January 1951

Sir:

I have reread your letter several times—not that it is lacking in eloquence, but your eloquence pleads a cause that does not seem to me defensible. Despite your efforts at reconciliation, the two ethics you describe are in opposition. It is self-evident that an agreement between them would be desirable; but, alas, it does not strike me as possible. At our present stage of development, it could only be the result of a misunderstanding, I ought to say of trickery on one side or the other—a necessarily precarious and illusory result in which one or the other of the opposing sides would immediately snatch from the other everything it had originally pretended to yield. It would be but a pretense of reconciliation and the situation would later on turn out to be, not the same, but seriously jeopardized by such an attempt at compromise. It is better to examine the question calmly while we still can, and I was about to say: with a level head while we still have our heads on our shoulders.

But I should first like to consider this: capitalism is a hybrid thing. In no country has it been able or willing to assert itself and realize itself fully. The freedom of the individual has nowhere been altogether compromised despite some deplorable accidents, which, however terrifying, have always been exceptions; but after all they have never become the rule and almost always the minority has found some possibility of recourse against them. Let me add that such accidents are constantly decreasing in number. You know as well as I that in the countries (I was about to say *the* country) in which unification of thought, of conscience, and of behavior is accepted, protected, and even imposed by the State, the slightest eccentricity is liable to the worst punishments. The sole concern of the citizen, if he does not agree with the watchword, is not to let this become apparent. And I even believe that the best examples of this

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must not be sought in the USSR (in a moment I shall say why) but rather in the countries vassalized by the USSR, where totalitarian rule is applied even more rigorously than in Russia. For in the USSR devotion to the regime developed thanks only to a certain pre-existing, often very sincere patriotism capable of slipping by degrees and through trickery into total approval of the system that the USSR is supposed to represent.

And this is indeed why there is no reason to expect a patriotic unification among those assimilated people. One cannot ask a Hungarian, a Rumanian, a Pole to sacrifice himself body and soul for the country that has conquered him. Their submission, obviously, can only be the result of constraint and oppression involving the impossibility of showing one's feeling, for we know only too well what that costs.

I wrote in 1936: "I doubt if in any other country the mind is less free, more bent over, more terrorized, more vassalized than in the USSR." I no longer have any doubt of this today. But I am willing to grant that the system of unification is much closer to "perfection" in the USSR than the capitalist system is in the USA at present. In the capitalist countries there still is considerable vacillation and many weaknesses, of which the individual can fortunately take advantage.

Furthermore, I have no illusion in this regard: that desire, that will toward unification of thought does not belong to Communism alone. We encounter it every time that power gives doctrine the hope of working on minds and souls. Catholicism (and even occasionally Protestantism and Judaism or Islamism) hoped to achieve a general enforced uniformity without ever stopping to consider that the accomplishing of such a process of leveling would be the end of arts, letters, and sciences, of all development of thought. Nevertheless, so long as a Church does not hand over to the authorities that represent it the means of coercion it possessed during the Inquisition, for instance, the free-thinker is still allowed to shrug his shoulders in regard to this or that dogma against which his reason revolts without thereby incurring exile, torture, or death: the risk of no longer being able to think at all rather than not to think properly (others being there to think for him).

ANDRE GIDE

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Benjamin DeMott

THE DEAD WRITERS

> *Someone said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we* know *so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know.*
>
> —T. S. ELIOT

Once when his friend bellowed contempt at the elegies, Douglas met him strongly: "I say this, Flinty; I say if you die before me, I'll be out at the edge of things all the rest of my time." Douglas had built much on the words. Indeed, because he had voiced them, he had become certain that Flint's death would be unlike any of the others that had mattered to him: it would not be priggish, would not insist that it be considered as a thing in itself. On the contrary, it would draw up through him the unrealized scraps of plan and purpose that had sunk in the years. It would create conditions for the forming of the whole. And to respond to these conditions rather than to his grief, to take Flint's death utterly for himself, to believe that with it must come a stop to all postponement, would yet be to do Flint the only homage.

Now, at the event (and Flint's death to be sure had been an event—a piece of the obituary running on the front page under the dispatch from Wellfleet), at the event he observed his extravagance. Admittedly, when he spoke the words he had not thought that Flint would die in the newspaper, nor had he been aware that so much would interpose: an office, conference day, the intelligence he possessed (before the opening of the paper) of flannel trousers for the stable time, October's pointless radiance, the bell's thunder shaking still, distant, petaled faces in the classroom, someone gracious in the library elevator—a Professor of German. But though he could not have known in what context the event would fall, he had nonetheless known that there would be a context. And even this knowledge had not made him hesitate. For the sake of the argument,

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or perhaps only to own that the *stube* behind the bookshop in Baltimore was a place worthy of a statement out of the penetralia of the self, he had made the absurd commitment. And built on it.

The *stube*, he acknowledged at last, was on all grounds unworthy: it stood in no relation to any of the substantial content of his life or of Flint's. Chimerical afternoon—why had he been in that town? Why had Flint called, chosen that place for porter? *Vinum daemonum* because it filleth the imagination yet it is with but the shadow of a lie. But Flint never lied for rhyme, wrote the wars, knew that nothing ended at the fact.

In all events, Flint had been stopped at the words, had thrown up his enormous hands, the gesture occasioning a sudden, rigid scream from the dachshund who rested upon the table of the only other drinker in the place.

This sound and Douglas's response to it could have brought the *stube* through the northern miles and fixed it in the field of revulsion that grew dense now in his office: the sound—a mere scream of surprise—still moved in the memory as precisely as the words he had uttered. But that it did only limned the truth that his revulsion was not simple; he drew back from no corruption in the words themselves—"at the edge of things the rest of my time." If he had permitted them to remain what they were, if he had not raised them upwards and upwards until they became the sacrament and calendar of his progress, the promised opening of the dungeon at sundown, they would not now have seemed diseased. Where lies wretchedness in the simple pretense (over porter and for the defense of the craft) that a single death can overcome a room and a situation? Nowhere. Hence it was no matter that he had been unable to allow for the intolerable pressure of the present situation; it was of no moment that he sat in an office, in a room with many bookshelves that bore nothing save his own poems, since these were the only duplicate volumes in his library and the bareness of the room had necessarily to be cut. Not the bell, nor the student, nor the circumstance that on this day, involved in the death of his friend in the wars, he would read edges of the experience of the generation which could not yet have had a communicable experience to bring except out of the war—none of the turns, none of the complexities, were of account. He had not been false because he had failed to foresee them.

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If he had been false, it was because he had built too extravagantly on the words.

To comprehend this was to give way to a notion which had quickly made much of itself as he sat at the desk with the newspaper before him. The notion importuned him at this moment to admit that he had lived his life not by cold philosophy but by casual remarks of his own, offerings lax and flaccid which nevertheless wound themselves rune-tight in the consciousness and finally bewitched him out of sense. He desired not to give way; he desired to war upon the notion, as Flint would have wished him to. Flint would have had him lacerate his own being for permitting the notion to become relevant to it. Douglas managed obeisance—in whirling words. From his desk to the opposite empty wall he cast speech of extravagant awkwardness yet, curiously, he, the flagellant, knew no pain:

"Words are bricks for the construction of the self. I have built on words mainly. Monosyllabic bricks in the wall at the edge of things—

"And if the truth be in words, yet why fear ye?

"Flint in the forest of the sick-cold years, alone in his knowledge: nothing ends at the fact. All dominated except Flinty. Upon the desk the generation of new facts: never another Flinty: no hope for witness of the coldness in the cold."

It was true that when he read the bits of paper which the season scattered across his desk—"an incident out of your own life, spend no time on it"—he was Tiresias, knowing ends and beginnings, process and the poles, what words would answer to and when they could not hear. Knock with the fact and they make answer; come with the soul. . . .

He rarely brought the soul. Having come with Flint into the late years of his age, everyman the poet commenced teach. Sit in the office of dead men, occupy the "noble old chair," display the reflective being to the clod: confer. Counsel out of Joyce for one bringing 1500 words and nine names and no density of time or of place: "Look again at the beginning of his big book—no, not that one, of course. But look at the one we can read—even he, you must see, had to come gently into his new way." Counsel from Tiresias himself—I, Douglas Calder—for one who had thought a narrative poem but who had gone to prose because he could find no line: "I don't know that

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you've read what I've tried of this sort, but I can tell you I'd thrown it into the desk after a year's work. I couldn't find a line that didn't break out from me. But then one Sunday morning I got my fingers into it, into just the right way, and afterwards it simply came."

Confer.

Sunday it had been—the sky flung open by the beating sun, white beaches slipping away like whirled wake from the sides of the car—Sunday, Sunday, when Flint, years after Baltimore, set him down. The noble old chair was accepted and he had gone to the issues driving out the Cape. What can I do, Flinty. The dead end, the school.

Goddamnit Flinty, when we were it there was the Cap. Flight from the skipjack to the moon in the sea. A thing to hate and company in the hating. A whole wide dollar-damned world to trade for verse. And after, a hunger march—sing God on relief. And after that, battle again.

Manfred, by Asst. Prof. G. Gordon.

O Flint we have lives not offices. What has Maine to communicate with Texas; what do you say to the notebook?

Flint set him down: "All romance." Calder is all romance, how high, how high. "Now look at me. Thirty years ago I sat out one term with Homer J.—right where you're going to be—and damned if he didn't teach me something.

"How to paragraph." Flint was serious. "Just that, paragraph. How to make them come on, how to set one up for the next, keep wheels turning all the time. I didn't know how to do it and Homer showed me."

So here was the task. Wait for Flint to come and show him how to turn wheels. Speak boldly at the beginning:

"I am not interested in dealing with any of you who wish to be writers. For you and me, desire is a dangerous thing. I want only those among you who feel that they are writers, that the thing is done and over and that they are helpless before it."

And call for an incident, "a moment of your own that's still breathing—set it down in oh a thousand words at most, and then I'll ask you in for a conference before you start to raise it up any higher."

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It was dark when the trucks stopped—blacked out—so we couldn't see where we were. A kind of castle outline in the blackness, but really not even that, only a stone building spread back against a hill. We went in. Each squad had an entrance of its own or so it seemed. Our sergeant—name of Davis—had a fat candle in his hand, and he brought us up some stairs into an imposing hall—vaulted ceilings two stories high. There was straw on the floor and the walls at each end were stone fireplaces. We dropped our stuff. . . .

Douglas helped. We dropped our stuff. We dropped our stuff and found logs somewhere and—to hell with the blackout—started a fire. The flames were what we watched, not each other. We thought of what it was meant to be and all the wall turned to flame and the hall went wild with it, the room had mass, simply mass—no size or shape—and the fiery reds rushed against the darkness beating on us and well

Let me tell you we were shit scared.

Let me tell you, boy, we never wanted that morning to come.

Sun go to cinders in the sea surge.

Douglas liked to rise with the morning and, above all, with the particular, even drab particulars. It is a pleasure to stand in the window of a castle and to see a battle and the adventures thereof below; and close by Douglas often desired to stop. But Flint had said and Douglas had believed, and believed as completely as he could without having made words for it himself, that "the senses only reply to the idea when addressed. You *cannot* believe in the particulars." Flint vexed—because he was positive. What after all did the palace of monosyllables in Baltimore aver except that nothing but the particular stirs to belief?

We dropped our stuff and waited. We couldn't sleep but we talked only a little. After midnight, Sergeant Davis said in a loud voice what we of course knew. "We're going in in a little while." After the pause, he added: "Might be a good idea if anybody's got anything to say to spill it now. Koch, you got anything?" What Koch said was the pattern for everybody else. He said:

"When we're sitting around next time, somebody won't be here, that's for sure. If it isn't me, whoever it is, I'll miss him. We got a good gang, fights and all. We've stuck pretty close and let's stick close now. And for God's sake you ammo boys come up without being called. I'm

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a son of a bitch if I'm going to stand up and whistle you in today."

Some of the others said about the same thing—wore out the hortatory "stick close" before they shut down. Then we slept a while.

In a grimpen, in a maremma, rain slicking the mossgrown stones, legs and rolling wheels were sunken columns, arcs sucked out of motion, trapped at the mired bottom of the earth. We slept a while in November and December's mud was the end of life. I had fear in my boot. When we crossed the Borger (75, 105, 155; 150, 210, 310; 225, 315, 460—crows, blind beasts, in the air over that hill), my heel seemed loose in the boot. That was a great terror. To look, to conceive, was beyond—that hill. I did not look and soon my foot, then my ankle went to stone. Upwards and upwards and all. I said always as we went:

"The legs of a man who needs them; hence let us celebrate the natural thing."

But the Hun broke at the lake and left nothing to pound. We stopped there, gasping in the fog. And I looked. The leg was whole and the foot needed only to be worked. I slept a while then. I had no fear.

Douglas liked also to speak in other voices. There was exhilaration even when he did no more than sense forms of speech proper to many, unique to another, but far from his own. But if Flint had no voice, no speech which was individual, still he had means of impressing himself upon the fact. He addressed the particular but he drank with meanings. And he took Douglas with him where he went.

In the mind Douglas traveled now, alone. Waiting across the hall, seated in the window, would be, very likely, the writer of the incident he read. Allen, O., tallest when the great bell burst the morning and swept up the classroom's horizontal line—Oliver Allen, conference at two. He will knock at the door with the fact and I shall make answer. Vouch for the sins of the child with the compurgation of the academy.

O my childer—here was Flint's voice if he had had one. O my childer what have ye done that ye know so little and fear so much? Come unto my door with all things save the will and I will tell you that the beginning is not unbelief but belief in unbelief. We

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say a cursed generation for it will not affirm. O hills hear thy prophets Flint and Calder: gray is the color of my true prophecy, dimmed the eye; the elevator soars to the marble hall and the end of life is the office.

And Flint will never come. A certain closeness of relation to your experience, Flint—no, I want to say this, let me—a certain closeness, that is what they will want out of you later and so they'll come back to you. A certain closeness of the ideal to the detail, a special friction in the irony. No, in all honesty let us see ourselves: when the fact is contrary to the ideal, we held—I following you—we held the ideal so close that the fact simmered in the sun, was not itself. I nearly following you.

I want to say—in a parenthesis—that I chose to set this down because I thought it would help me to realize what I actually know of these two days. But as I call it up every detail rather sprays out into non-objectivity. I doubt all of it, and know none of it; even what I want most to be certain of disappears. A shadow world . . .

It was that kind of world we came out into a few hours later. More trucks, noise coming in closer. We got out in a terrible racket, but our own stuff was making it.

We formed squads and took off, through a grove. I had the tripod—

I had the tripod was Crane's way, not good enough finally for Flint. In every detail, the privated form, the opposite implied. There is no incident without the contradiction and the contradiction—it is immutable—is worth supplying. One must cross from the general principle to the observable facts on the wire of logic, but one must come back: thought racing from side to side at light's pace: neither the fact nor the soul alone but the confluence. Flint and Calder, scholiast skeptics: yes, of course; yes, of course.

And yet in the fullness, in the totality, in the fair land of Ness, the ideal and the real are one. Flint said, Flint said. Hence Crane is not whole.

Or does a time occur when the whole is fact alone—the time of Crane and the time of Oliver Allen the student? And in such time, in any moment, this moment, when the word is disembodied and I Calder discover my being in words only—in such time, is Calder truly with but the shadow of a lie? Or can he simply not drink with Flint. There is a difference.

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We'd been going about five minutes—long enough to get to the edge of the grove, when we heard some shouts coming up the incline that rolled back to the trees. Some of our riflemen were down there at a fence and they were calling to us to pass these guys on back to the rear. Couple of Kraut prisoners they were. Davis understood right away—and almost all the rest of us. He waved and the prisoners started up the hill. Davis was out ahead where he should not have been, of course, and with him was the chap by the name of Bonjurno who was his walkie-talkie man and his favorite almost from the beginning in the States.

When Bonjurno started to yell I thought that it was almost the first time that I'd ever heard his voice—he was the quietest in the platoon. But I didn't have much chance to reflect on his voice because the case was that he'd gone off his head. He screamed—God what a sound it was—"They're coming, they're coming!" Over and over he screamed it and he pawed at Davis like a small, frenzied ape.

Davis was so shocked he could do nothing but push out at him awkwardly in what I'd guess now was simply profound embarrassment, not even disgust. The Germans were about 75 yards off; they knew something was wrong but like the rest of us the spectacle—it was that and nothing else—fixed them and they just stood watching. But to be safe, one of the Germans raised his hands high up.

That set it off. Bonjurno threw himself down on the ground, pulled at his carbine until it came off ripped with the walkie box from his shoulder, and he started to fire. He was wild, way wild—half a clip went up at the dead stars—all of us standing there like stone men, nobody really aware of what he was after. Then suddenly he let out one mad shriek—"I've got them!"—and leaped up and ran at them firing. The Germans knew; they went for the ground. But on the way one of them caught it, right in the middle of the face.

Bonjurno turned around, quivering, looked at us. He started to cry. Davis headed toward him. I don't know what he had in mind doing, what could have been done—he'd taken our names in vain, that was all, damned us. Anyway Bonjurno saw Davis and ducked past him on an end-around, brushed right by me—his face wet and torn and wild as a winged rabbit at the brook—and disappeared on the run into the forest.

When his ships were down, pikes cooled, blood thick, the wind standing firm, Duc William sent to the Pope and rehearsed once more the oaths of Edward and of Harold. Before my court, upon

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his honor. In the witness of Holy Church and Her Saints, upon his honor. Before God, before God, upon his honor, did Harold swear an oath he was my man. Father, Blessed Father, bless our struggle. May God damn and quarter the perjured one. Douglas could still hear Flint saying as he handed him the ranges: "God it is good that this has purpose. I don't believe in the soul and neither do you but son of a bitch this has got to be holy. Why could we stand it?"

O it is pleasant, it is pleasant. It is a pleasure to stand upon the shore and see ships tossed in the sea. But Flintsaith, Flintsaith: you cannot believe in the particular: no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth and thus to see the errors and wanderings and mists and tempests in the vale below. —Umque. —umque. Lord God damn and quarter the perjurors at the brook and the channel and the range desk. Lord God damn and quarter Flint and Domesday on the vantage ground shadowed with a lie—for then it will be easier.

Douglas sat silent, trembling slightly at his baseness, holding the incident from the war in his hand. In the silence he sensed his own words scrambling from him, effluences now disconnected from thing and idea. He had come to the end of the incident and there was little time before the appointment with its reporter, but he lingered a moment beyond with Flint. He understood that he wished to abandon his friend: once he had been certain that this would be to abandon himself. He knew that he had been willing to curse his friend; he knew that he had in fact implored Oliver Allen and the great Duke to unmask Flint, disclose him as hypocrite and perjuror.

Yet in this was nothing but well and fair. It was fit that Flint be buried once for all. What was base was that he had not strength to put Flint down—even his foreknowledge had not given him strength. Douglas did indeed know the end. He knew that if he had built all on the word, if his response had been always to the word—not to feeling, situation or principle—he might have been wiser, not weaker, than Flint. For what had begun long before Flint died (Flint, because positive, had denied himself cognition of it) would continue, would intricate questions that no man could stop.

That the words revolve about the earth, Flint assumed.

Wrong, it will be seen, Douglas said. It will be seen. Sentience, the particular—all that his friend supposed must answer to the pri-

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vated form and to the general, all that his friend "knew" could speak only when addressed by the idea—all will be disclosed in final dependency upon the word alone. The blessing and the perjury.

But to comprehend this was not to abandon Flint nor to win release from the revulsion at the words which had been spoken over porter. It was only to stand like stone upon the vantage ground and see—at a hopeless distance—something intolerably rich and vague. True, Douglas could advance to the perception that to have built upon the word, however extravagantly, would be to have built in the direction of the city, and that to have constructed in fortune's words, to have responded only to the stuff of the constructed world, would be to rise firm from the given as no Flint could.

But his sense of the conditional opposed the excitement of this intelligence: here at two o'clock in October was no choice but to admit that the calendar would run past him: at this thought he wept at last—for himself and for his friend. Amid the tumult of the great bell he then rose, prescient in his grief. He walked quite quickly through the room which was now dense with the clapper's ovation and the swelling sun; and he answered the knocking at his door by greeting Oliver Allen with some spirit.

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Louis Auchincloss

EDITH WHARTON AND HER NEW YORKS

Henry James, writing to Edith Wharton's sister-in-law in 1902, warned her that their mutual friend should be "tethered in native pastures, even if it reduces her to a backyard in New York." Mrs. Wharton was living, at this time, increasingly in Europe, and he, already an expatriate of twenty years' standing, knew well enough the danger to the artist inherent in such a way of life. Ten years later, in a letter to Mrs. Wharton herself, we find him repeating his warning, this time with a wry little touch of humor at his own expense:

> Your only drawback is not having the homeliness and the inevitability and the happy limitation, and the affluent poverty of a Country of your Own (*comme moi, par exemple!*).

Viewed from the vantage point of today this comment seems almost a cliché. It is hard to read the slick satires of Edith Wharton's later years about an America which she had not bothered to revisit for two decades, without reflecting that she appeared, at the end, to have lost not only her country but her talent. What is curious, therefore, is that James should have foreseen this so clearly and yet should never have quite appreciated how much in 1902, and even in 1912, she still *had* a country, or at least a city, of her own. It may have been that he was too out of touch with New York to see how well she was still writing about it. Her ties, of course, were stronger than his. She had been brought up in the city and had married there. She had experienced its social life, in greater doses than she had wanted. She knew its men and women of property; she knew their history and their origins, their prejudices and ideals, the source of their money and how they spent their summers. This

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knowledge, of course, was eventually to fade with her continued residence abroad, but the ten years that preceded the first war were actually the years when her American impressions were at their most vivid and when she was doing her strongest and best work. It was the period of *The House of Mirth* and *The Custom of the Country,* the period when, true to her own vocation, she became the interpreter of certain aspects of New York life that she was uniquely qualified to describe.

The thing that was going on in Mrs. Wharton's New York of this period, and which she chose as the subject of her main study, was the assault upon an old and conservative group by the multitudes enriched, and fabulously enriched, by the business expansion of the preceding decades. The New York of the pre-assault era was the New York that she was later and nostalgically to describe in *The Age of Innocence,* the town of sober brownstone houses with high stoops, of an Academy of Music with shabby red and gold boxes, of long midday lunches with madeira, of husbands who never went "downtown," of a sense of precedence that was military in its strictness. As she tells us in her own autobiography, when her grandmother's carriage appeared on Fifth Avenue those of her aunts maintained their proper distance in the rear. To this New York belong such of her characters as Mrs. Peniston, Lawrence Selden, the Peytons, the Dagonets, the Marvells, the van der Luydens. It was a city that was worldly beyond a doubt, but worldly with a sense of order and form, with plenty of leisure time in which art, music and literature could play a moderated role. The people from this world may lack strength of character, but their inertia is coupled with taste and observation, as seen in Lawrence Selden's parents:

> Neither one of the couple cared for money, but their disdain of it took the form of always spending a little more than was prudent. If their house was shabby, it was exquisitely kept; if there were good books on the shelves there were also good dishes on the table. Selden senior had an eye for a picture, his wife an understanding of old lace; and both were so conscious of restraint and discrimination in buying that they never quite knew how it was that the bills mounted up.

The young men practice law in a listless sort of way with much time for dining at clubs and trips to Europe. They have a settled

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sense of how their lives are to be led and no idea of impending change. The change, if change it really is, comes with the infiltration of the other protagonists of the drama, the Spraggs, the Wellington Brys, the Gormers, Sim Rosedale, the Van Osburghs, the Bryces, people who can spend a thousand dollars to Mrs. Peniston's one. Their assault on the brownstone citadel of old New York and its rapid capitulation provide a study of conflicting and ultimately reconciled types of snobbishness. The reconciliation is not altogether a surprise, for snobs *can* usually be reconciled. The old society may have had a brittle and varnished shell, but it covered a materialism as rampant as that of the richest parvenu. It could only be a matter of time before the new money was made to feel at home. Mrs. Wharton anticipated Proustian distinctions in her analysis of the different layers of the social hierarchy, but it is a dreary picture unrelieved by a Swann or a Charlus. From the top to the bottom of *The House of Mirth,* from Judy Trenor and "Bellomont," down through the pushing Brys and the false Bohemianism of Mattie Gormer, to the "vast, gilded" hotel life of Norma Hatch, the entire fabric revolves around money.

Conflict is lost in fusion, which brings us to the deeper drama of *The House of Mirth,* the drama not of rival classes who drown their feud in a noisy merger, but of their victims, those poor beings who are weak enough to care for the luxury, but too fastidious to play the game. Lily Bart, of course, is the most famous of these. We see her first at the age of twenty-nine, beautiful, vivid but tired, regaining behind a veil that "purity of tint" that she is beginning to lose "after years of late hours and indefatigable dancing," waiting in Grand Central "in the act of transition between one and another of the country houses that disputed her presence at the close of the Newport season." But we are soon made aware of the sea of unpaid bills and small favors in which she precariously floats. Lily suffers from the paralysis of inertia. It is not that she is unaware of the void that gapes before her; it is rather that she has too much delicacy and sensitivity, that she is too much of a lady to make the kind of marriage that will save her from the fate of turning gradually from a guest into a hanger-on. Her father has been of old New York, but her mother, one gathers, is of more ordinary material, and it has been the latter's greed that has driven him to make the

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fortune that he is bound, by the same web of fate that enmeshes his daughter, to lose. So Lily is of both worlds; she understands both, and, before she has done, she has slipped between them and fallen prostrate beneath their stamping feet. The pathos of her fall is that the failure to act which precipitates each stage of her descent does not come from any superiority of moral resolution but rather from a refinement of taste, a fastidiousness, of which neither her meticulous aunt, Mrs. Peniston, nor her coarse admirer, Mr. Rosedale, have the remotest understanding. Indeed, one feels that Lily Bart, in all New York, is the lone and solitary lady. Yet with each slip in the ladder she experiences the coarsening that comes with the increased sense of the necessity of holding on, and though she can never bring herself to tell George Dorset of his wife's infidelity, even to win the town's richest husband and triumph over her most vindictive opponent, she can ultimately face the prospect of marriage with Sim Rosedale as a way of getting the money to pay a debt of honor. And when she does stoop it is too late; even Sim Rosedale won't have her, and Lily takes the final drop to the milliner's shop and ultimately to the overdose of sleeping tablets.

In *The Custom of the Country* Mrs. Wharton is again dealing with the conflict of materialisms, but this time the central study is of a parvenu, Undine Spragg, who cuts her way to the top of the heap. Her victim—for there is always a victim—is a man. Ralph Marvell is self-consciously of "aboriginal New York"; his forebears whose tradition he can never forget have been "small, cautious, middle-class" in their ideals, with "a tranquil disdain for money-getting" and "a passive openness to the finer sensations." But Ralph has just enough curiosity to be interested in "the invaders," as he calls the new rich; with cultivated decadence he finds an essential simplicity in their acquisitiveness. His cousin, Clare, another victim, has married invader Peter Van Degen and learned to repent, "but she repented in the Van Degen diamonds, and the Van Degen motor bore her broken heart from opera to ball." Ralph sees it all clearly, but he is to be different. He is to save the "innocence" of the Spraggs; he is to keep *them* from corruption. He goes down to speedy ruin before Undine, and his suicide is almost a matter of course. The victim, however, is too naive; one's sympathy is confounded with impatience. It is Undine's book; her victims are incidental. She is the personifica-

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tion of the newcomer, absolutely vulgar and absolutely ruthless. Everything happens to Undine, but nothing affects her. She marries once for money, a second time for family and a third time for money again, only to find in the end that her divorces will keep her from being an ambassadress. And that, of course, is the only thing that she ultimately wants.

The Custom of the Country appeared in 1913, and the next four years Mrs. Wharton devoted entirely to war work. Her main job was with the Red Cross in Paris, but she visited military hospitals at the front and from a cottage garden at Clermont-en-Argonne she witnessed the victorious French assault on the heights of Vauquois. But the "fantastic heights and depths of self-devotion and ardor, of pessimism, triviality and selfishness," as she describes the war years, did little more for her as a writer than they have done, in either war, for many others. Their most important effect was to introduce a note of nostalgia, an escape, as she describes it, to childhood memories of a long-vanished America, to the "mild blur of rosy and white-whiskered gentlemen, of ladies with bare sloping shoulders rising flower-like from voluminous skirts, peeped at from the stair-top while wraps were removed in the hall below." But this was the New York, was it not, that she had found so stuffy and confining, that she had shown in losing battle with the Spraggs and Rosedales and from which she had fled to Europe? It was a New York, was it not, that had been passive, inert, confining, a city that had almost deserved to be eaten up by the new money of the energetic parvenu? Now, however, that it was gone, really gone, she found herself looking about and wondering if she had not gone too far in its condemnation. Much later she was to confess:

> When I was young it used to seem to me that the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured. Now I see that one of its uses lay in preserving a few drops of an old vintage too rare to be savored by a youthful palate.

Out of this sense of apology came *The Age of Innocence*. It deals with a New York that is pre-Spragg and pre-Rosedale. Newbold Archer is the young Whartonian of brownstone lineage, the Marvell type, a lawyer, of course, with a leisurely practice and an eye for books and pictures. He marries conventionally, and the story

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of the book is that he does *not* leave his wife to go off with the Countess Olenska, New York born but emancipated. There is no feeling, however, that Archer has condemned himself and the Countess to an unrewarding life of frustration. The author is absorbed in the beauty of rules and forms even when they stamp out spontaneity. "It was you," the Countess tells Archer, "who made me understand that under the dullness there are things so fine and sensitive and delicate that even those I most cared for in my other life look cheap in comparison." This is the climax of the message: that under the thick glass of convention blooms the fine, fragile flower of patient suffering and denial. To drop out of society is as vulgar as to predominate; one must endure and properly smile.

The novel, however, despite its note of calm resignation and sacrifice, is pervaded with a sense of materialism. The presence of "things" clogs even the best of Mrs. Wharton's writing. The author of *The House of Mirth* was also the author of *The Decoration of Houses*. One feels the charm of Ellen Olenska, but one feels it too much in her taste and possessions: "some small slender tables of dark wood, a delicate little Greek bronze in the chimney piece, and a stretch of red damask nailed on the discolored wallpaper behind a couple of Italian-looking pictures in old frames." She has "only two" Jacqueminot roses in a slender vase, and her tea is served "with handleless Japanese cups and little covered dishes." She finds a friend in Philistia; he understands Europe, and their refuge is in the arts, but their talk is filled with references to private rooms at Delmonico's and "little oyster suppers." Even in the moment of greatest emotional strain, when she looks at her watch she looks at a "little gold-faced watch on an enameled chain." The vigor of the earlier books is largely gone, but the sense of the world remains.

It was now that Edith Wharton found herself at the crossroads. She could have continued in the nostalgic vein of *The Age of Innocence* and tethered herself, in James's phrase, to the native pastures of her early memories. The tendency might have been toward the sentimental, but the result could have had the charm of remembered things. One can see this in the little series known as *Old New York*. But, unfortunately, she chose for her major efforts the contemporary scene, especially the American scene, although it was a decade since she had crossed the Atlantic to revisit her native shores.

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Older and shriller, she denounced the vulgarity that she was now beginning to find in everything, judging America, the country in her eyes most responsible, by the standards of Riviera expatriates whom she did not even know.

The vulgarity on which she had declared war ended by overwhelming her novels. Taste, the chosen guide of her later years, went back on her. In the final dissolution, as with the Barts and Rosedales, conflict is again lost in merger. The very titles of the later books betray the drop of her standards; they are flat and ugly: *Human Nature, The Mother's Recompense, Twilight Sleep, The Glimpses of the Moon.* The caricature of American life becomes grotesque. The towns are given names like Delos, Aeschylus, Lohengrin or Halleluja, and the characters speak an anglicized dialect full of such terms as "Hang it!", "Chuck it!", "He's a jolly chap" and "A fellow needs. . . ." The town slogan of Euphoria in *Hudson River Bracketed* is "Me for the front row." And the American face! How it haunts her! It is "as unexpressive as a football"; it might have been made by "a manufacturer of sporting goods." Its sameness encompasses her "with its innocent uniformity." How many of such faces would it take "to make up a single individuality"? And, ironically enough, as her indignation mounts her style loses its old precision and begins to take on the slickness of a popular magazine story. Compare, for example, these two descriptions of a lady on the threshold of a European hotel. The first is from *Madame de Treymes,* written in 1907, one of her Jamesian passages, but highly polished:

> The mere fact of her having forgotten to draw on her gloves as they were descending in the hotel lift from his mother's drawing room was, in this connection, charged with significance to Durham. She was the kind of woman who always presents herself to the mind's eye as completely equipped, as made of exquisitely cared for and finely related details; and that the heat of her parting with his family should have left her unconscious that she was emerging gloveless into Paris seemed, on the whole, to speak hopefully for Durham's future opinion of the city. Even now, he could detect a certain confusion, a desire to draw breath and catch up with her life, in the way she dawdled over the last buttons in the dimness of the porte-cochere, while her footman, outside, hung on her retarded signal.

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The second is from *The Glimpses of the Moon,* fifteen years later.

But on the threshold a still more familiar figure met her: that of a lady in exaggerated pearls and sables, descending from an exaggerated motor, like the motors in magazine advertisements, the huge arks in which jeweled beauties and slender youths pause to gaze at snow peaks from an Alpine summit.

Specimens of old New York in the novels now become spindly and ridiculous, like Mr. Wyant in *Twilight Sleep* and Mr. Spears in *Hudson River Bracketed.* The Wheaters in *The Children* are meant to be rich New Yorkers traveling in Europe. Their children, of various nationalities, their absurd marital mix-up, their impossible, red-carpeted, be-yachted life, with a movie star ex-wife whose favorite swear word is "Fudge!" and an American-born princess who hopes that the size of families will be regulated by legislation, constitute a grotesque parody of international drifters. Mrs. Wharton has no true insight into their lives; she stands apart like her spokesman, Mrs. Sellars, in disdain, describing the Wheaters only in terms of snobbish and disapproving suppositions.

Eventually there seemed to be no aspect of American life that did not disgust her. It was not only the vulgar rich; there were also the vulgar intellectuals. This passage from *The Gods Arrive* is meant to represent a conversation between young American writers in Paris.

"Poor old Fynes," another of them took it up, "sounded as if he'd struck a new note because he made his people talk in the vernacular. Nothing else new about *him*—might have worked up his method out of Zola. Probably did."

"Zola—who's he?" somebody yawned.

"Oh, I dunno. The French Thackeray, I guess."

"See here, fellows, who's read Thackeray, anyhow?"

"Nobody since Lytton Strachey, I guess."

"Well, anyway, 'This Globe' is one great big book. Eh, Vance, that the way you see it?"

Vance roused himself and looked at the speaker. "Not the way I see life. Life's continuous!"

"Life continuous—continuous? Why, it's a series of jumps in the dark. That's Mendel's law, anyhow," another budding critic took up the argument.

"Gee! Who's Mendel? Another new novelist?"

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It took more than ignorance to produce the clumsy satire of this passage. It took resentment, resentment at the formlessness of a world that had repudiated the very formalities which she had once satirized.

In 1937, the year in which she died, Mrs. Wharton was working on a novel that shows a brief, renewed interest in the New York of her childhood from which she drew *The Age of Innocence*. This is the posthumously published fragment, *The Buccaneers,* the unfinished story of three American girls in the 'seventies who make brilliant English marriages and become the envy of a New York which had scorned them. The book has more life than its immediate predecessors, but on its very opening page we find its author still laying on satire at the expense of America with the now customary trowel. She refers to certain tall white columns on the portico of the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga which "so often reminded cultured travelers of the Parthenon at Athens (Greece)."

Guy Thwarte in this unfinished tale is the thread that links it with so many of its predecessors. Although English, he is still the Wharton hero, tall and good-looking, a Gibson man, and, to the amazement of his family, though he has a "decent reputation about women" and is a "brilliant point-to-point rider," he "messes about" with poetry and painting. Like French classic heroes the Wharton men keep their action off stage. Guy consents to dip into commerce, but only in foreign climes. He disappears to Brazil for four years and returns a millionaire, but the "dark, rich stormy years of his exile" lie "like a raging channel between himself and his old life." The notes at the end of the book show that he was fated to elope with the Duchess of Tintagel; it was to be the triumph of "love, deep and abiding love." One cannot feel after this any keen regret that the story was never finished. Lily Bart's love for Lawrence Selden is the one hollow note of *The House of Mirth*. Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* is, of course, incapable of love. Love in *The Age of Innocence* is stifled by the characters themselves. Mrs. Wharton at her best was an analyst of the paralysis that attends failure in the market place and of the coarseness that attends success. Hers was not a world where romance was apt to flourish.

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John Ashbery

THE PICTURE OF LITTLE J. A. IN A PROSPECT OF FLOWERS

He was spoilt from childhood by the future, which he mastered rather early and apparently without great difficulty. —BORIS PASTERNAK

I

Darkness falls like a wet sponge
And Dick gives Genevieve a swift punch
In the pajamas. "Aroint thee, witch."
Her tongue from previous ecstasy
Releases thoughts like little hats.

"He clap'd me first during the eclipse.
Afterwards I noted his manner
Much altered. But he sending
At that time certain handsome jewels
I durst not seem to take offence."

In a far recess of summer
Monks are playing soccer.

II

So far is goodness a mere memory
Or naming of recent scenes of badness
That even these lives, children,
You may pass through to be blessed,
So fair does each invent his virtue.

And coming from a white world, music
Will sparkle at the lips of many who are
Beloved. Then these, as dirty handmaidens
To some transparent witch, will dream
Of a white hero's subtle wooing,
And time shall force a gift on each.

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That beggar to whom you gave no cent
Striped the night with his strange descant.

III

Yet I cannot escape the picture
Of my small self in that bank of flowers:
My head among the blazing phlox
Seemed a pale and gigantic fungus.
I had a hard stare, accepting

Everything, taking nothing,
As if the rolled-up future might stink
As loud as stood the sick moment
The shutter clicked. Though I was wrong,
Still, as the loveliest feelings

Must soon find words, and these, yes,
Displace them, so I am not wrong
In calling this comic version of myself
The true one. For as change is horror,
Virtue is really stubbornness

And only in the light of lost words
Can we imagine our rewards.

Louis Simpson

THE RETURN

You that have returned to the western city,
To whom returning has become a habit
And a belief in immortality,
Yet, as the porter takes your bags
How quickly are you hurried out of truth
To meet those faces, faces of your youth,
Of age, stone eagles on their crags,
Stricken faces you must reassure
That you, and they, are still as you were.

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Tell them of islands where the wars are over,
Of cities where the citizens are few
And here and there the penitent survivors
Play at chess; and lovers two and two
Walk in the gardens, time hangs on their hands,
They press against each other, wondering
Where the other came from, now they know
Another sky in which their echoes grow,
And the red heart is startled and takes wing.
What do they care, that bone grind on bone,
If the white flash will rip the veils of stone!

And for the old you'll paint the fabled crests
Where antlered deer still play
Whose dainty hoofs are silenter than snow.
An eagle's blink below
Boys cool their sun-striped bodies in the lakes.
All night the violins and woodwinds go
A measured, mild and meditative pace;
The hunter's rifle booms across the day.
Those ruins had an eloquent allure,
This was an antique, legendary place.

And tell the young of islands where you wondered
How long you'd been away, although you'd never
Been there before. They'll see, if they are clever,
The separation in the single cape,
Under a sky shining without a mark,
And then how suddenly the world is dark
The pines are doubled and the ocean thunders
And the storm makes them dance, each goatish shape.

To stand above the valley like a funnel
Where the wind roars with a smell of fennel
And see the curling white-caps sail away,
Moorish sails flying to Africa,
And turn your footsteps down
To where the red-tiled town
With its still castled crown
Trembles upon the Moor-remembered bay!

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With such as these avoid the cypress shade
Nor stress the ruins' eloquent allure,
But simply sketch the contour of a hill,
The calm of night and evenness of noon,
And the strong nets that native hands have made.

As we grow older everything comes true.
There is no homberg-hatted presence who
Comes home to listen, judge us, and dispose.
We are the giants and we are the elves,
And soon we are the only mystery
And we must make the voyages ourselves,
And learn a parlor trick, wear one false nose,
And act as uncles, and do not disclose
What is not there at all,
Until we turn into the scenery
And children swing upon us as their tree.

Leslie A. Fiedler

IN VAIN FROM LOVE'S PREAKNESS I FLY

Win, place or show, tired absolvers,
All day you have repeated the track,
Until now your knowing it quivers
In the dark whose virginity is no joke.

Let me kiss fatigue from your fetlock,
Having in God to love all lovers;
For the humped jockeys rode you today like fevers,
And your iron endings embarrassed the track;
And the wind's desire, where your tail made black
Ambush, was taken and foundered on the forgotten cock.

Hell,
We needed no programs to know who you were!
Running was what we paid for;
We were still.

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Nathan Halper

JAMES JOYCE AND THE RUSSIAN GENERAL

All through *Finnegans Wake,* there are allusions to Buckley shooting a Russian general. Then, in the eleventh chapter, the shooting is discussed for almost twenty pages. This has puzzled the exegetists.

Why is it that important? Why is it relevant? We are told that it happened back in the Crimean War. How does it get into the dream of a pub-owner in Dublin? What is more, there's no record of a Buckley ever shooting a Russian general. Why does Joyce say it happened? Why in the Crimean War?

Even such friendly critics as Wilson and Levin have been moved to exasperation. It may be the most capricious section of *Finnegans Wake.* But it has become the model, the *locus classicus,* of all in Joyce's work that seems private and perverse.

If we can find a meaning, a plan, under the apparent chaos, there will then be a presumption of a plan, of a meaning, in the book as a whole.

In the light of the above, let us look at this tale and at the problems that it raises.

First—Who is Buckley?

On p. 5, we learn that the Archetypical Man bore the name of Wassaily Booselaeugh. Underneath the distortion, we may see Vasily Buckley.

Vasily is a Russian name. If we think of Buckley, too, as being a Russian word, a curious thing occurs:—*B* is prounced like *V*. *c* is pronounced like *s*. Instead of the *y,* let us take the Russian *chay.* Instead of the *k,* let us take the Russian *ee.* Buckley turns into Vusilich.

Vusilich (Vasilich) means "Son of Vasily." Buckley, in other words, is the son of Vasily. Thus, if Vasily Buckley is the Arche-

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typical Man, it should follow that Vasily is the Archetypical Father. Buckley, the Archetypical Son.

I suggest that Vasily is the Russian general. When Buckley shoots the latter, that is the archetypical tale of the Son who kills the Father.

Is there any corroboration? Well, let us turn to the section I have mentioned. There, in the eleventh chapter, our pub-owner dreams of a noisy night in his pub.

On p. 338, Joyce prophetically puts a television set in the bar. Two brothers, Butt and Taff, appear on the television screen. For almost twenty pages (338-355), they talk about the shooting.

Their dialogue gets interrupted: for instance, on p. 349, we are taken to the scene. We are shown the General as he receives the Last Rites. At this point, he has the name of Popey O'Donoshough.

Pop is Russian for a priest. The earliest Russian priests were Byzantine Greeks. Let us think of O'Donoshough as being a Greek. Under the dream-distortion, he is Athanasius. Pappa Athanasius—The Everlasting Father.

On p. 342, there is a horse race on the screen. Emancipator is in the lead. Immense Pater, in the rear. The Immense Father. On p. 353, there is another interruption. The destruction of the atom. The Adam. Father Adam.

We're told that this is a "dawnybreak." That is: this is a Donnybrook. Also—a *dawny*-break. A rising of the sun. A rising of the Son. On p. 349, we get a similar pun. The time is *heliotropical.* This means turning toward the sun. A turning—toward the Son.

Perhaps the most amusing bit happens on p. 344. One of the brothers, Butt, breaks into cadenced speech. The rhythms are those of Synge. At first, we may wonder about the point of this parody. Then, we remember. *The Playboy of the Western World* is a story about a son who kills his father. Young Mahon (pronounced Man) kills old Mahon.

It's a dream. And, as befits a dream, the latent meaning is concealed. —Let us look at the concealments. Why is the Son an Irishman? Why is his name Buckley? Why is the Father's name Vasily? Why is he a general? Why is he Russian?

Vasily comes from the Greek. Basil, Basileus. King—Vico tells

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us that the first Kingdom was the Family. The Father was the King.

Boucal (bouacaill) is the Irish word for boy. It is fitting that Vasily is the Father, that a Buckley is the Son.

As for the nationalities: all through *Finnegans Wake,* the Irish race is used as the Archetypical Race. The Irish thought their sires, such as the Picts and the Milesians, once lived in Scythia. The steppes of Scythia lay in the present Russia.

The general? He's Vasily. Basil, basal. He is the Universal Man. He's the whole Community. In other words—the general.

He's the priest, the king, Frazer's royal priest, who, in his appointed time, is slain by his successor. We also begin to notice some of Frazer's apparatus. On p. 349, we read of the mistletoe which the golden sickle cuts. On p. 360, Joyce shows us a golden sickle.

What of the Crimean War? The *Crimea* is the place of the Crime, of Freud's primeval crime. That of *Totem and Taboo.* That of the Parricidal Son.

The Crimean War revolved around the Siege of Sevastopol. On p. 338, the scene is quickly placed. Butt says, "Sea vaast a pool." Sevastopol.

The text, at this point, has a number of Hindu terms, such as Buddha, Karma, Krishna, hiding under the distortion. With this as a guide, we see that "Sea vaast a" is the same as *Sivaista*—the adjectival form of Siva. Sevastopol is Siva's pool. And, since his color is black, it is a Black Pool.

Now, Dublin is composed of two Gaelic words. *Dubh* is black; *lin* is pool. Dublin is—a Black Pool.

Sevastopol is Dublin.

One of the better-known engagements at the Battle of Sevastopol was the one at Balaclava. Back in its early days, before it had the name of Dublin, Dublin was Baile atha Cliath, which is pronounced Balaclee-e.

What occurs in Balaclava happens back in Balaclee-e. What occurs in the Crimea is committed back in Dublin.

The Archetypical Crime has to happen, specifically, in the Archetypical Place. For Joyce, this is Dublin. But, on a different level, Dublin is a particular place. In it, a particular man owns a particular pub.

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There is a picture in the pub. On p. 334, when the picture is described, we see that it presents the Charge of the Light Brigade. This occurred at Balaclava.

The owner, in his fifties, feels his powers are declining. Fearing he will be supplanted, he dreams of this picture. He dreams of a charge. Charge of the Light Brigade. Charge of the *Light* Brigade.

Of the Sun. Of the Son.

The Crimean War is the Archetypical War. But, on a second level, it is a particular war. If we have to name a fight in which an Irish boy and a Russian general could have fought on opposing sides, this is the most likely choice.

There were many Irishmen who fought in the British forces. One of these, Cecil Buckley, covered himself with distinction, winning the Victoria Cross. If the drinkers in the pub desired to talk about this war, they thus had the topic of a young, triumphant Buckley.

Also—that of a stricken general. F. E. de Todleben, commander of the Russian army, was wounded at Sevastopol in June, 1855. This had a decisive bearing on the outcome of the siege, influencing the decision of the Russians to withdraw.

These two themes were separate, but they were available, ready to be combined in a customer's talk and therefore in a pub-owner's dream.

The latter is a particular man. A man who owns a pub. That this is his occupation also fits with his being the Archetypical Man, the Archetypical Father.

A pub is a public house: a house of the people. Whiskey (*uisce beatha*) is "the water of life." In the House of the People, the host is the Father. He dispenses the life-giving fluid. *Eau de vie*. *Aquavit*. The water of life.

He's the host. The multitude. He is—the general.

On p. 359, we are told that this tale is part of a serial running in *Fearson's Nightly*. Fears Sons. Nightly.

In addition to this fear, the dreamer has a sense of guilt. Though he is a Father now, he was once a Son. When he dreams of Buckley's sin, he repeats his own.

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The Russian word for *dream*—is *son*. The word for *son* is—*sin*.

The Father's fear is every fear. His dread of his Son is a dread of his old age, his defeat, death and dissolution. To him, Buckley stands for Change. He is his Anxiety. He is all Uncertainty. He is Tomorrow.

In a similar fashion, Buckley's guilt is every guilt. The Father is the Yesterday. He is all Authority. He is Law and Precedent. Any time that these are breached, Buckley shoots the General.

On p. 334, when the picture is described, some of the phrases parody Tennyson's *The Light Brigade*. The horses and the men also echo *Humpty Dumpty*. In other words, the tale of Buckley—the tale of the Light Brigade—is the story of a Fall. Humpty Dumpty is the Egg. He must fall and burst for the future to emerge.

There are the rhythms, too, of *John Peel*. A hunter's song. We hear a shout of *Tallaght Hoe*. Tally-ho. A cry of life. — But Tallaght was the old Irish place of burial.

It is thus a cry of death.

The Father is a sacrifice.

He's the host: the communion, the bread, the staff of life. The phallic staff.

He's the totem. The communal father. He dies—so his sons may live. On p. 7, his sons devour his flowerwhite body—his *flour*-white body.

The word *host* means *sacrifice*.

He is the biological host. He carries in him the organism that is going to destroy him.

As for the Russian general, his name is de Todleben. *De* Tod, Leben.

From Death—Life.

The Artist is the Host. He dispenses the spirits, the water of life. On p. 44, a man whose name is Hosty sings the Archetypical Song.

He is the Host. The sacrifice. He suffers so that he may sing. The painful thorn is at his breast.

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On p. 335, he is the "rawshorn generand." The raw-shorn power that begets.

He's the Dreamer. The Artist is the Father. He begets what is new. This, however, presupposes a destruction of the old. When he does this, he's the Son.

A *host* is a *stranger*. A *host* is a *foe*.

The Artist is a Son. He is hostile, a stranger, in the Inn of the Father.

In the House of the Host.

Joyce is Stephen Dedalus. Dedalus: the Creator. Stephen: the first Christian martyr. But the Artist he portrays is merely a Young Man. Though he talks of his creating a "loveliness that is unborn," he is not a Father yet. He cannot create as yet. He is incomplete.

In the last part of *Ulysses,* Dedalus realizes that he is akin to Bloom. As a Son, he sees his kinship to the Father. As an Artist, he perceives that he's kin to the Man.

In the *Portrait of the Artist,* Dedalus sees himself "a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life."

He is still a priest. But, in addition, he's become "the daily bread." He's the sacrifice. The Host.

Here, in *Finnegans Wake,* he is the rebellious Shem. (Shem: an Irish form of James.) He is also HCE. The aging Father.

He shows us his anxieties, his sense of guilt, his defeats, troubles, disappointments. Out of these he makes a song.

On p. 58, the guilty dreamer sees himself as a man who's on trial.

He's a man of trials—the man at the bar. In other words, he's the host.

On this page, his name is Festy King: a king, Vasily. (Stephen is the Greek for crown.)

Festy (Festus) is the Latin form of—Joyce.

We have mentioned Hosty who, on p. 44, sings us the Archetypical Song. On p. 48, Hosty becomes Osti-Fosti. As the latter is described, it is plain that he is Joyce.

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Why the name Osti-Fosti? Well—the Latin word *hostis* was originally *fostis*. Ergo—

Osti-Fosti.

Who is our authority for this little bit of information? It is a Roman rhetorician—whose name is Festus.

James Joyce is the Dreamer. He's the Host. The Russian General.

On p. 349, as the general is receiving the Last Rites, we see that he carries *The Martyrology of Gorman.*

Herbert Gorman's biography of Joyce.

On. p. 354, near the end of the episode, we hear a "Cicilian" hurdy-gurdy.

It's a Sicilian hurdy-gurdy. It's a reference to Cecilia, the patron saint of music. It's a reference to Buckley, the authentic Buckley, who had the Christian name of Cecil.

This is still another meaning: both Cecil and Cecilia are derived from *caecus*. Blind. This gives us an allusion to Joyce, purblind Joyce. He is cranking his hurdy-gurdy. The hurdy-gurdy of *Finnegans Wake.*

In his blindness, in his darkness, Joyce creates *Finnegans Wake.* In the dark of his unconscious, the Artist makes his Art. The Dreamer makes his Dream. In his dreaming, he assuages the attritions of the day.

In the night, the Father, too, does his labors of Creation. He repairs what has been lost. He renews the day-time world.

Strangely enough, de Todleben made his fame at Sevastopol in a much similar fashion. An engineer, nightly he threw up new defenses. With these, he replenished what had been destroyed by day.

The Father, we have said—the Father yields before the Son. Then the Son becomes the Father.

There is a new orthodoxy. There is always a new dogma. On p. 354, the children make a common turn.

The rebels make—a Comintern.

In the first part of this paper, we attempted to discover what the tale of Buckley meant. A horse-race, an explosion and the story of

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young Mahon were among the things we cited. Let us look at these again.

On p. 342, Emancipator is the Son. Immense Pater is the Father. They are clearly the same horse.

Young Mahon (344) thinks that he has killed his Sire. It develops that he hasn't. The old Mahon is alive.

On p. 353, we witness an explosion. It's the atom's annihilization. But, on turning to the page, we notice that the word is really "abnihilization." *Ab*-nihilization.

There is thus a dual motion. *A* and *ab*. *To* and *fro*. Atoms are made into nothing. They are made out of nothing. Old Adam is destroyed—a new one takes his place.

But—instead of atom, Joyce uses the word *etym*. This is the Greek for *meaning*.

Joyce is destroying language. He is annihilating meaning—he is re-creating meaning. He is re-creating language. In other words—"in other words"—he is writing *Finnegans Wake!*

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Diana Trilling

A COMMUNIST AND HIS IDEALS

In discussing the myths of totalitarianism this evening[1] it is my intention to stay with that form of totalitarianism which most of us know best—the totalitarianism of the left—and to touch on the totalitarianism of the right only in passing. The Communists believe, of course, that there is but a single totalitarianism—fascism—and that we are all of us in imminent danger of its triumph. I think you will agree with me that this is a false picture of the American situation. Certainly it is a false picture of the section of American society with which most of us in this room are familiar. I myself have never met a fascist. I have known conservatives and reactionaries, but I have never met a single individual who could properly be called a totalitarian of the right. On the other hand, I have known, and known fairly well, not only every shade of liberal and radical opinion but their perversion—Stalinism. And I think this is the case with most of you.

I would describe the section of society which gives us so one-sided an experience as the intellectual middle class, except that the term is neither accurate nor comfortable. It is preferable, I think, to refer to ourselves as the "idealistic" middle class—especially if we would wish to include, with us, those people with whom we feel a certain economic or vocational connection, but little political agreement. For the term idealistic middle class not only takes into account an idealism that does *not* think. It also properly emphasizes the common denominator between all the various and conflicting kinds of minds that are directed to social progress. What constitutes our inevitable kinship both with our thinking friends of the left *and* our *un*thinking enemies of the left is, surely, the fact that we all, in some measure, take our political preferences from the impulse of idealism.

By idealism we mean the dedication to goals beyond self-interest. No fascist was ever dedicated to goals beyond self-interest. The fascist may be dedicated to something apparently larger than merely his own personal advantage—some advantage, say, to his nation or class. Even

1. This paper was delivered at a symposium on the subject "Myth and Freedom," sponsored by the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, New York, May 1951. Further discussion of the political and psychological bases of the Communist myth will appear in subsequent issues of PR.

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so, he is animated by self-interest, because by self-interest I mean whatever redounds to the individual's welfare or prestige—the welfare and prestige of his country, his class, his race, his religion, his profession, even of his sex. Indeed, I take this to be the chief clue to the fascist mentality—that the fascist impulse is primarily the impulse *of* self-interest, or self-appreciation.

The idealist, on the other hand, is someone dedicated to goals beyond self-interest. He is impelled not, like the fascist, by motives of self-appreciation, but by the opposite. And what is the opposite of self-appreciation?

I should like to leave this vaguely unpleasant question hanging unanswered for a moment while I return to something I have already mentioned—the variety of minds that are directed to social progress: just in this country, I mean, and in recent decades. We are all of us aware of how complex a business it is merely to try to distinguish among all the various degrees of Stalinism. There are out and out Stalinists, party members. There are out and out non-party members. There are Stalinoids and pseudo-Stalinists and proto-Stalinists and crypto-Stalinists. There are conscious fellow-travelers and unconscious fellow-travelers. There are Communist liberals, both conscious and unconscious. There are even ex-Communist communist liberals.

And what about ourselves who are just as various? Right in this room there are no doubt representatives of every possible faction of enlightened anti-Stalinist political opinion—radical socialists, Christian socialists, Jeffersonian democrats, Rooseveltian democrats. There are even some of us who have the temerity to call ourselves liberals. If I venture, then, to merge all of this diversity into the single figure of the idealist, it is clear that there will be bound to be a certain distortion of individual truth. Yet this is what I am going to do: I am going to draw a composite picture of contemporary idealism. Most of you are to some degree dissident from the dominant idealism of our time—and to you I promise to restore your full identities, as you can honestly claim them. It is the *dominant* idealism of our time of which I am speaking.

The political idealist, then, is someone who is first and foremost concerned with virtue. Whether he is himself religious or not—and in most instances, he is not, although there will have been religion not too far back in the family—he is acutely conscious of the high moral considerations with which the religious ethic deals. He sails by the star of the Absolute, whose light is no longer the blinding radiance of theology, but, rather, the cool clear light of social good.

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Like the religious man, he lives by self-judgment. And similarly, his self-judgment involves a maximum of standard—and a minimum of pride. In fact, there is but a single pride the political idealist is permitted—a pride in his political idealism.

Living for virtue and without pride, the idealist is forced always to keep his eye elsewhere than on himself. Himself is, by assumption, a weak and faulty vessel, and he can find good only where he is not—in the country which is not his country, in the class which is not his class, in the races and religions which are not his race and religion, in the occupations which are not his occupations, in the advantages which are not to his advantage, even (sometimes) in the sex which is not his sex. The fascist lives on the principle of self-appreciation? The idealist lives on the opposite principle—the principle of self-depreciation.

The part played by the Russian Revolution in the forming of the idealistic mentality of our time is, of course, immeasurable. It was the Russian Revolution that gave middle-class idealism its solid foundation in guilt. Capitalism tried to abort the birth of the proletarian revolution; idealism has never done expiating this sin against the holy ghost.

But the existence of a successful Communist state also gave us the knowledge of an absolute of social good toward which we might bend our efforts of growth and dignity and our hopes of salvation. Well before the Russian Revolution the philosophy of social materialism had brought the hope of heaven down to earth. It took the Russian Revolution to make real this heaven on earth for the modern imagination—to put it on the map with a name and address to which we could direct our energy of aspiration.

Of course, even before the Russian Revolution we had been taught that the map was something bigger than merely our own country. Internationalism—the belief that the interest of the community of nations transcends the interest of any single nation—was, of course, one of the earlier tenets of the idealistic faith. But unfortunately, the international sentiment not only started *before* the establishment of the Soviet Union; it seems also to have ended *with* the establishment of the Soviet Union. Perhaps nothing, in fact, is more striking in the evolution of modern political feeling than the change that has taken place in the international sentiment since Russia has become our absolute of good. For the founding fathers of modern liberalism—for such people as Shaw and Wells and Bertrand Russell—the international preference was truly a preference. It was not a choice against; it was not, what it has now become, a choice against one's own nation. Only since the Russian

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Revolution has a concept which was designed to combat the dangers of an excessive nationalism—to combat chauvinism and imperialism—come to mean, not anti-chauvinism, not anti-imperialism, but anti-all decent feeling for one's own country.

And we all of us know the odd transformation by which anti-nationalism has become pro-Russianism. I am not speaking of spies, they are an extreme instance. I am speaking of ordinary American citizens of education and supposed conscience, for whom America has only to have something, or want something, or do something, for that something to be automatically wrong—in much the same way that, for the progressive adolescent, his family has but to want something, or have something, or do something, for that something to be wrong. But if everything America does is wrong, everything Russia does is right. America spends months trying enemies of the state? This is legal lynching. Russia goes through the farce of a trial, or executes her enemies without trial? This is revolutionary justice. America seeks oil in the Near East? Imperialism. Russia grabs oil wherever she can get it? Well, machines need oil, do they not? One is inevitably reminded of the joke about the woman with the married son and the married daughter who boasts what a wonderful marriage her daughter has made—she has three fur coats, two maids, breakfast in bed every morning—but laments what an awful marriage her son has made—married to a woman who wants three fur coats, two maids, and who has breakfast in bed every morning.

The path by which the idealist has moved from his total refusal of concern for his own country, to total concern *for* one other country, the Soviet Union, runs, in brief, something like this: The international brotherhood of man is embodied in the international brotherhood of the working class. Only in the Soviet Union is the working class able to give and receive the hand of international brotherhood. Therefore the Soviet Union *is* internationalism. Behind the refusal of commitment to our own country, there lies—in other words—a refusal of commitment to our own class.

This leads me, naturally, to the second broad feature in my composite portrait of contemporary idealism. The idealist is someone who finds virtue only where he is not—in the country which is not his country. Also in the class which is not his class.

You will remember that I am speaking only of the idealistic middle class. Presumably there is also such a thing as working-class idealism, but that is too complex a matter for me to deal with. I mention it here

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only for what may be one significant way in which it differs from middle-class idealism. There is never, it seems to me, the same breach between working-class idealism and working-class realism, as there is between middle-class idealism and middle-class realism. When Marx said, "Workers of the world, unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains," he may have been offering the working class a false hope. Perhaps the promise of the dictatorship of the proletariat is necessarily false—because dictatorship is tyranny, and one cannot set out to tyrannize over others without, in the end, becoming the victim of tyranny oneself. But at least he spoke to the real requirements of the working class, to what they could believe were their real immediate needs. He did not speak to some high selfless goal.

This is not to say that the working class isn't just as susceptible to myths as the middle class is. The workers of France and Italy today who are being led by Communists are being led by myths. But the working class is never, I believe, as susceptible as the middle class is to that most powerful and destructive myth—the myth of selflessness. Even where a worker is Communist-led, at least he believes he is being led on his own behalf.

Parodying Marx, the radical intellectual of the 'thirties used to say, "Intellectuals of the world, unite, you have nothing to lose but your brains"—and probably this was the closest conjunction he ever made between *his* ideality and his reality. For this was in the depression, when many intellectuals were just as badly off as the proletariat. Brains weren't buying much. But even in this crisis, the intellectual never dared speak in his own name. The proletarian spoke in *his* own name, but the intellectual spoke in the name only of someone with whom he might temporarily confuse himself but who he was not, could never be and never would have wished to be—a proletarian.

Today, prosperity is restored, and we contemplate its class advantages with a certain composure. But its class guilts still persist. The windows of the penthouse still open on a prospect of doom. The landscape, however, is not peopled as it once was. Now it is not miners and steel workers and sharecroppers who excite the guilty emotions of the idealist. It is the depressed peoples of Europe and Asia, the Jews of Israel, the Negroes, and, most recently, the teeming victims of a rising American reaction—movie actors and radio writers.

The notion that people who are different from ourselves have a special virtue goes back, of course, a long way—at least as far as Rousseau's noble savage. And in the last fifty to a hundred years, it has taken a new impetus from the breakdown in the religious authority. With

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God gone, whose power we could suppose was benevolent, the best we seem able to do is to put good where there is at least no power of bad; in other words, where there is no power—in the oppressed. With the end of the depression, when power was restored to the proletariat, idealism forsook it in droves—is there anything more striking in present-day progressive life than how little regard there is for what was once the noblest of all causes, the cause of labor? Labor is strong, like ourselves; so it is probably no better than we are, and no more worthy of our support. Instead, idealism has turned to the cause of the racially and religiously oppressed, the Jews, the Negroes, the Chinese. Behind our idealistic diplomacy in this last decade in the East, obviously there has lain the assumption that Communism among the poor, backward Chinese could not possibly be real Communism, the kind we had to fear. It could not be Communist power. The Chinese were so different from ourselves. They were so weak and childlike, we were so mature in industrialism and evil. We must help them to whatever they needed—at whatever risk to ourselves.

Idealism did not *think* about the Chinese Communist problem, any more than it really thinks about the Negro problem or the Jewish problem. It sentimentalized about the Chinese and called sentimentality the new practicality; it called sentimentality a realism *more* real than the reality which stared us in the face. And when people who did think tried to make themselves heard, idealism didn't listen. For dissident opinion was the opinion of a little group of sour intellectuals. The opinion of a little group of dissident intellectuals is indeed always sour.

And thus we come to another feature in our composite portrait. The idealist finds virtue only where he is not—in the nation which is not his nation, in the class which is not his class, in the races and religions which are not his race and religion. Also in the occupations which are not his occupation.

Last week, in discussing the responsibility of the intellectual, Mr. Elliot Cohen made the point of the intellectual's responsibility as a person trained to think. The point needs to be made even more strongly, for what we see today, all around us, is the intellectual's almost conscious abdication of his powers of mind. In the 'thirties the idealist feared selling out, economically. Today, he makes the choice against the life of mind, not only for economic advantage, but in the strange belief that the choice against the life of mind somehow represents a greater fulfillment of his human possibilities. At best, the idealist is uneasy about his intellectual occupation. At worst, he is filled with self-contempt, even self-hatred. And the results, in our culture, are everywhere to be seen.

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Thus, we have liberal educators who would wish to gear American education to the lowest instead of the highest intellectual potential of the population, calling this democracy; we have a liberal weekly which for a long time could boast that not a word appeared in its pages which was over the head of a high school student; we send our children to schools which are progressive in the degree that they treat a love of books as if it were some form of psychic disorder. . . . One could extend the list at discouraging length.

The question is, why is all of this so? Why does the idealistic middle class think so little of itself and of everything that pertains to it? Well, I am afraid that I have no simple answer to that question, and no time for conjectures, beyond, perhaps, a single one: could it be that we have lost our sense of our own worth because we have lost the sense of our creative power? Certainly our notion of the creative process has profoundly altered in recent decades. We no longer think of ideas as power—although we are exhorted to think of them as weapons. We no longer think of creativeness itself as a form of power. The great spirits of the past, the revolutionary spirits even up to the turn of this century, all of them—however dissimilar they were—had this in common: that they considered themselves engaged, not in a work of reclamation or fortification, but in a work of free creation. They were, they felt, creating new and powerful ideas—whether it was Tolstoy creating his own brand of Christian socialism, or Freud creating his idea of the unconscious, or Lenin creating his idea of the proletarian revolution. But we today do not create; we submit ourselves to needs. By idealism, indeed, we precisely mean *not* creating, but serving—and serving a good which is not our own.

But I say "we"—I say we and our, and whom do I mean by "we"? I think it is time I redeemed my promise to restore your separateness to those of you who can honestly claim it and rescued, or at least urged, the rest of us out of the lengthening shadows of our pasts.

I have been drawing a composite portrait of the dominant political idealism of our time. It is my proposition this evening that the kind of idealism I have been describing characterizes wholly only that section of the intellectual middle class which is in the Communist orbit. By "we," therefore, I mean ourselves in this room only insofar as the picture may fit us historically. This is how we were, if we were, Stalinists. If we were never this way, then we were never prey to the spirit of left totalitarianism—and we were uncommon members of our particular section of society.

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But on the other hand, if we still conform, not to all, but to any of the features I have been describing, we still linger in the darkness of our former allegiance. If, say, we no longer depreciate the worth of our nation or of our class, but still depreciate ourselves as thinking persons, then in that measure we still give sustenance to a culture which means to destroy us as thinking persons. Stalinism is against life because it is against what is life-giving in a proper estimate of the self. It is against freedom because it is against the only kind of freedom that means anything—the kind the self recognizes and grows by.

We are here to discuss myth and freedom. I can think of no myth that supports freedom, for how can an artifact support a reality? And either freedom is a reality, or it is indeed a myth. I have already mentioned, however, what I think is the most powerful and destructive myth operating among decent and supposedly thoughtful people to rob them of their freedom—the myth of selflessness. We are moral people, peculiarly conscious of the values by which we live. When we deny, as political and cultural Stalinism insists that we do, a full sense of our own value, when we deny the worth of ourselves, then inevitably we must substitute for our own worth the worth of something which is not ourselves. This is the psychology of subservience; we become servants. And where there are servants there are masters. This is the path by which an ideal politics, a politics of supposed freedom, becomes a real politics of repression. It is the path by which Communism has become a totalitarianism as bad as fascism. First it teaches us to put but a poor price on ourselves; then it puts but a poor price *on* us.

But in speaking as firmly as I do against the self-depreciation of the idealist, am I suggesting that we adopt the fascist principle of self-appreciation? No, I am not suggesting that we dedicate ourselves to a life of self-interest. I am not asking us to stop being idealists—but just to stop being the wrong kind of idealists. I believe it is dangerous to undervalue what is our own—whether it is our own nation, class or intellects. This does not mean that, instead, I think we should act as if only that which is ours is worth bothering about. I believe that the dominant idealism of our time is unwholesome. This does not mean that I am against idealism. Quite the contrary, it seems to me that the major work which must now be undertaken by our culture is the work of reconstituting a new and healthier idealism—an idealism which would properly relate the requirements of the self to the requirements of others.

It is the business of all personal growth to learn how to harmonize, or adjudicate between, contradictory forces. We live in a predatory

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economy, circumstances would seem to require us to be predatory, we do not like predatoriness; we have to learn how to hold our own in the economic struggle without ourselves becoming grim and grasping. We live in a culture of free sexual enterprise which is yet a family culture; we have to learn how to accommodate the enterprising spirit with the spirit—or force—of family responsibility. Every time we make a decision in our purely personal lives, we confront extreme possibilities: we most of us learn to mediate between them. It is just so that we learn, in the political life, to assert a decent demand for ourselves within the bounds of what is also best for mankind in general. Thus, we do not become chauvinists, we continue to criticize our own country as we must. But we take into account the welfare of our own nation as well as the welfare of the community of nations. We do not give ourselves over to the false or mean values of class—our instincts to justice and generosity remain—but we cherish the privileges we would wish to extend to a class which does not have them. We do not become intellectual prigs, but we value our minds; we feel we have as much right to be heard on our highest level of development as others have on theirs; we insist that we, as intellectuals, have as much to contribute to civilization as farmers or mechanics—and, as a corollary, we accept our duty to think clearly.

And so it turns out that all I am asking for, as I ask that we establish a new high ground of motive between the opposing principles or right and left totalitarianism, between the self-appreciation of the right and the self-depreciation of the left, is simply pride—a decent pride as the basis, and guarantor, of our political virtue. To value ourselves, and then, because we value ourselves, also value others: what better guarantee can we have, or want, of our political morality?

What I am suggesting, in other words, is the need in our political lives for a new respect for the self, and of everything that pertains to the self, lest we conspire in our own extinction.

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LETTERS FROM PARIS

I
AMBIGUITIES OF POLITICS

In July 1940 a seventeen-year-old French *lycéen* was asked by some adult what he thought of events and of the future, and he answered: "I don't know. I will have to think all this over."

I don't know what happened to that young student. He might thereafter have become a Gaullist, a Petainist, or a Communist, or he might even (but it is unlikely) have remained neutral. One thing is sure, however: he has never had the time to think things over, he has not been left alone by events, and by people's insisting that he take a stand. Which he probably did, more or less conscientiously, at each new occasion. Even if he remained aloof and inactive, it must have been because he was not persuaded by the alternatives that were offered him, rather than because he had reached some new conviction.

I remember that boy's answer, because his attempted withdrawal into reflection and silence seemed to me both genuine and natural at the time, and yet impossible. The situation was one of emergency, and what followed was a sequel of emergencies. The choices that were offered had the character of being both elementary and equivocal, precisely the kind that cannot be avoided, and, if they are avoided, one is left with a sense of guilt, not of clarity. France had fallen, hence the French nation was in question. Hitler had won, hence maybe Hitler was right, or at least maybe his system was. But Nazi domination was unbearable, hence De Gaulle was right in practice, although his ideas remained obviously weak. Did patriotism become right because Hitler was a beast? In a sense yes, since France was no longer an idea, or a textbook notion, but a society struggling for its survival. Yet France's survival at all costs was also Petain's justification. But his methods were contemptible. If survival at all costs meant dishonor, however, the question of an ideal was again raised. The Resistance was full of ideals, and in fact it showed that any ideal, patriotism, Catholic faith, socialism, royalism, democracy, Communism, provided it was firmly held, could breed revolt against the Nazi negation. But, if you chose the Resistance, you did not choose a particular ideal or ideology so much as a certain group, a certain form of action, a certain *fact*. The only coherent ideol-

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ogy at hand was Communism, and its practice was based precisely on the postulate that insisting on a formal accord between ideals and action was a silly prejudice, the only truth that mattered being the permanence of the Party and of the Socialist Fatherland behind it.

Throughout the process, there was never time to indulge in the search for Cartesian clarity. It was not even a matter of choosing the lesser evil, but whatever the choice (and because one was too passionate to remain inert), of following a certain course of action. Which one, was finally a question of what people one liked best, what kind of language one preferred to hear spoken. The essential value was loyalty, not truth. Hope too, of course. What came was a form of lesser evil: the Fourth Republic and another emergency: the cold war, with its imperative choice between "the gray and the black." "Thinking it over" seems, again, to be out of the question.

It is not unimaginable that the boy I saw in Toulouse in 1940 was one of the students who, after the publication of *Darkness at Noon* in French, wrote Arthur Koestler three letters whose content Denis de Rougemont, in a recent article, summarizes as follows: "Sir, I consider your description of Stalinism accurate. As a consequence, I am becoming a member of the Communist Party. What I was looking for was, in fact, precisely that kind of discipline, and efficacy."

It is not unimaginable either, however, that the young man in question would today agree with the remarks I heard recently from a friend of mine, an intellectual who, after having taken a heroic part in the Resistance, has completely withdrawn from any political activity, works hard to earn a living by writing short stories and articles for the illustrated weeklies, and, at the same time, is curiously bent on developing a morality of his own and, so to speak, for his own consumption. "The first thing I have to say is that I consider myself an average man, a man, that is, without any direct contact with such things as first principles and truth. More particularly, I consider myself incompetent in matters of government policies. As an intellectual I might, at times, feel more ambitious. But I have a wife and two children, and support them producing literary contrivances which I try to render as harmless as I can, and which have no connection with serious values. If I did not consider that this compromise is incompatible with the pursuit of moral and intellectual truth, I would be a hypocrite. But if I simply resigned myself to mediocrity and conformism, I would be a coward. What can I do then, if not try to be honest, carry on a kind of personal resistance against the inertia of the everyday? Trying to be honest, I have adopted the principle of never going in words beyond what I

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am actually ready to do in practice, and, conversely, of never doing in practice something which I cannot explain in my own terms, that is, those of whose meaning I am personally sure.

"This, of course," my friend continued, "limits my sphere of influence considerably. For all practical purposes, to my wife, children, and neighbors. What is likely to be good or bad for them, I take as a measure of what I should do or avoid doing. Beyond that, there is doubt. Doubt, I insist, not negation. I am well aware that I cannot dissociate myself, my wife, my children, and my neighbors, from the fate of the community, of the classes that compose it, and also of other nations, the world, and mankind itself. Only, as things are today, no sooner have I entered such ground, than I feel I am in a sphere where compulsion, rather than persuasion, is the rule.

"Let me explain. In politics, I am still what used to be called in France *'un homme de gauche,'* that is a man who thinks that politics makes sense only insofar as the citizen has the means of opposing *raison d'Etat,* that is of making the State sensitive to his claims. At present, however, *raison d'Etat* is everywhere, even in such trifling matters as the price of the *métro*. All political parties justify what they do, or don't do, by pointing to *raison d'Etat*. There are differences, of course. There is the principle so neatly formulated by the Hegelian sophist quoted in Roger Caillois' *Description du Marxisme*: 'Truth, in Russia, is not an opinion. It is a State.' That is Terror. Against Terror, I hope I will always have the courage to revolt. On the other hand, there is the argument of emergency, that is of a *force majeure* suspending, for the time being, the realization of the desirable without, however, abolishing political freedom. To *force majeure,* I cannot but yield. But neither can I help noticing that, for us Frenchmen, the realization of the desirable disappeared from the political horizon around 1938, never to reappear except in the form of a passionate and short-lived illusion after the Liberation. That ideas and individual opinions have no relevance to politics seems to have become a political fact today. I don't question it. Nevertheless, I am, in all honesty, obliged to recognize that since this fact makes it silly to oppose *raison d'Etat* as a matter of principle, it also puts my political faith in abeyance. If I have not become indifferent, like many of my neighbors (except those who have submitted to the surgical operation of Communist orthodoxy), it is because I just can't do it. I am too worried, and, at the same time, too doubtful to be indifferent. Hence, all I am left with is ups and downs: moods, rather than opinions."

Such an attitude as this might not be very strong intellectually,

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but it is certainly significant. A Marxist might define it as the provisional rationalization of an unconvinced petty bourgeois, that is of somebody who tries to persuade himself that taking a petty bourgeois position in practical and intellectual matters might offer some protection against history. Polemically, the Marxist might even be right, but actually he would miss the point just the same. The point being that the rejection of extremes, the insistence on doubt, and a certain suspension of judgment, are today too widespread in France to be just a class affair. One can indicate with perfect assurance the locus where a Frenchman's judgment comes to a stop: it is the perspective of a Third World War. If pacifism means confidence that war can be avoided through a popular initiative of some kind, nobody is a pacifist today in France. As a mood, "neutralism" is certainly widespread, but, as soon as it attempts to be a practical solution, it sounds improbable and rhetorical. Actually, most people feel that, the situation being what it is, there is little space left for individual attitudes, except the line that separates resignation to from acceptance of, the inevitable. The inevitable, after all, might not be war. In the interval, there is suspense, an atmosphere in which fanatical screams, dogmatic attitudes, final assertions are simply not in order.

What is true is that there are very few people in France today who try to rise to a comprehensive view of events. One of these few is Raymond Aron. As a political journalist and a political man, Aron has taken a resolute anti-Stalinist and pro-American stand. That is, I feel, what gives a particular significance to a series of articles on the problem of war which Aron, the historian and the philosopher, has been publishing in *La table ronde* and *La liberté de l'esprit*. These articles are fragments from a book to be published shortly under the title *Les guerres en chaine* (War as a Chain Reaction).

We all know the pages of the *Antidühring* in which Engels, after having outlined a history of warfare from the discovery of firearms up to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, expresses the singularly optimistic view that conscription, plus the industrialization of modern warfare, will necessarily bring about, by way of dialectics, the transformation of the "Army of the Prince" into the "Army of the People," hence "the end of militarism." An analysis of the development of two World Wars leads Aron to a view that is quite the opposite of Engels'. In his opinion, the logical consequences of conscription and industrialization were stopped twice in modern times (after the Napoleonic and the Franco-Prussian wars) by political, not economic, factors. Until, in 1914, came the "technical surprise."

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The meaning of the "technical surprise" is contained in the figures of war production. Before 1914, the French General Staff anticipated a daily consumption in battle of 13,600 light artillery shells; the number of workers that were supposed to be needed in the war industries was calculated at 50,000. In September 1914, the same General Staff was asking for 50,000 shells. It got them in January 1915, when it had already asked for 80,000. This last figure was attained in September 1915, when the generals were asking for 150,000. In 1917, the number of workers in the war industries was 1,600,000. The diplomats and the generals thought that what they had begun was just a war, and after a few weeks they found themselves confronted with what was to be the first "total war," a war of attrition and annihilation, whose real proportions completely and irremediably transcended its original causes and supposed aims. "The question could no longer be the advancing of some frontier posts by a few dozen kilometers. Some sublime and vague principles, like the right of peoples to self-determination, or the war to end all wars, were the only goals that could measure up to such an amount of violence, sacrifices, and heroism. Technical *hubris* imposed, little by little, the substitution of ideologies for war aims. On both sides, men pretended to know *in the name of what values* the war was being fought, but nobody could say *for what practical goals.*

"Everything happens as if, starting from a certain point, violence fed on itself. For war, as for fissionable materials, there exists a critical volume. Since 1914, Europe has been the victim of a chain reaction of wars." Yet, if the forces at play in modern history are overpowering, Aron insists, history itself remains, at every moment, "a combination of logic and accidents." A compromise peace was possible in 1917, before the Russian Revolution, according to him, and it would have changed the course of events. Also, in 1936, a chance existed that Hitler could be stopped. Even during the war the Anglo-Americans could have found a way of conquering Germany without destroying it, thereby creating a situation quite different from the present one. There is nothing fatal about the advent of Stalinism, Aron believes. "It is the Second World War which made possible the conquests of the Red Army in Europe, and the victories of the Communist parties in Asia. Once again, the decisive cause of Stalin's victories are the wars that have disintegrated the social and political structures, creating the circumstances in which a militant sect succeeds in seizing power. . . . Starting from conscription and modern industry, war, once unleashed, was bound to become hyperbolic, unless the statesmen had had the improbable wisdom to renounce certain potentialities of the system. . . . As a consequence

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of war, we witness the insurrection not of the workers against the owners of the means of production, but on one hand of the peoples of ancient culture humiliated by the mysterious forces of the creators of the machines, and, on the other hand, of the miserable crowds confusedly aware of the incapacity of their traditional rulers to build a modern State. . . . The wars of the first half of the twentieth century have ripened a catastrophe which, if compared to the catastrophes of yesterday, would be what the atomic bomb is in comparison to the 420 shell.

"Nothing allows us to say, not even after the fact," Aron concludes, "that things could only happen the way they actually happened. . . . We can find reasonable explanations. . . . We can see causes . . . but we can't suppress the interval between the circumstances and their final outcome: it is men, or rather certain men, who by their action or their failure to act, have made this history which they did not want." Hence, one surmises, between the circumstances and the outcome (or, as Aron puts it, between "the obvious necessity to stop the chain reactions of violence and the growing difficulty of establishing a peaceful order") there is still room today for man's initiative. The only mortal sin is fatalistic action, or failure to act.

Obviously, Aron does not in the least think that his considerations on total war are in contradiction with the political position to which he adheres, namely that of unconditional resistance to Stalinism and support of De Gaulle. In fact, he considers Stalin the consistent representative of the principle of total and unlimited violence ("Permanent revolution today means permanent war," he has written in another article). Tormented as he is by the perspective of a third war, Aron does not believe that there would be much sense in letting oneself be drawn by anguish into faltering: the kind of reasoning that consists, since the issues are overpowering and frightful, in narrowing them to the point where they are tame enough to permit at least a verbal solution. At the same time, if Aron is pro-American it is, among other things, because he considers that the Atlantic community, based as it is on interests that cannot be unified by force, must of necessity have an empirical policy, a policy, that is, that offers at least a chance of escaping ideological determinism and its catastrophic consequence, global war.

Since Aron's essay has been published only in fragments, it would indeed be indiscreet to draw too many conclusions from it. It is certainly permissible, nevertheless, to give Aron's consideratons as one example of the way the French mind reacts to the strain of the present emergency—with no blinking at what may become fatal, but also with a

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visible repugnance for the unmeasurable and the mechanical. The disappearance of optimism has strengthened, rather than weakened, at least among the best, French attachment to reason and the sense of limit.

Naturally, when one leaves particular individuals and outstanding intellectuals, and turns to diffuse feelings, journalistic polemics, current party politics, and government action, the picture becomes quite different. In judging French political life today, one should never forget that it is still based on an artifice: the restoration of the old parties that followed the Liberation, and on a mutilation: the absence of a principled opposition from the Left, caused by the Communist schism. The *raison d'être* of the artifice is the fact that the collapse of the present majority would mean the end of the Fourth Republic under Gaullist or Communist onslaught. Its net result is a paralysis of government action that touches on the grotesque, and a discrediting of the political parties which favors precisely the two-fold danger that compromise was supposed to avoid: Gaullism and Communism. As for the collapse of the Left, its main cause is probably the omnipresence of the *raison d'Etat* noticed by my friend, the modest citizen. It is obvious that only mass parties and mass organizations whose aim is precisely the conquest of the State, can give people the impression (or the illusion) that such things as radical changes are possible. But French repugnance for mass organization and mass slogans is great indeed. One could even say that in France, the individuals are still more numerous than the masses at present. Which is another way of saying that France is still a reasonable country. Maybe this is a terrible weakness today. But it is also a fact. Hence, when one speaks of the absence of a Left, what one means is the lack of a political formation that could become a force without being an affair of ideological fanaticism and authoritarian discipline.

In the meantime political life is reduced to a minimum and political passions are in a state of constant repression, which is not healthy. How unhealthy, is shown by the fact that political phenomena take the form of sudden outbursts: strikes, violent polemics, and scandals.

Take the recent polemic on "neutralism." It is a characteristic example of how real issues, as soon as they are brought into the open, are made both narrow and general. Narrow, because they have to be "adjusted" to the public one wants to influence. General, because, finally, they have to take the form of catchwords.

"Neutralism" is precisely one of these polemical catchwords. It is obtained by abstracting from a state of mind which is widespread in

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France and in Europe a certain number of critical remarks about American and French foreign policy, and by generalizing them into a formula. The state of mind is real and deserves serious attention. The critical remarks are often pertinent, and in any case worth discussing. The term is equivocal.

Let's start from the state of mind. Its substance is sick disgust at the prospect of war. To realize the impact of this feeling on the French and European mind, one must realize that the war that threatens the world appears to most people in Europe as a kind of neutral fact—a cosmic accident that would occur not so much because some ruler wanted it, but because one ruler was unable to prevent it. Which is one reason why "neutralism," as a catchword and a pretendedly possible course of action, is entirely inadequate to express the feeling (Aron's considerations are much more pertinent).

Aside from the feeling, there are two main arguments, which are simple enough to impress public opinion in general, and not just people of a certain political persuasion. They have been repeated by the press not only in France, but all over the world. The first was expressed by a British M.P. in the following way: "We are telling each other that in two years we shall have an efficient army. But, if such is the case, why should the Soviets wait two years?" The second consists of the simple observation: "America can afford to lose a battle, and even all the battles except the last. But Europe can give only one battle. If that one is lost, everything is lost." With this sort of apprehension we touch the rock bottom of French and European morale. Call it "demoralization," call it "defeatism," or call it "common sense," it is a fact. Nothing can change it, except facts that would give both hope and strength. If "neutralism" as an answer to such apprehensions is so weak, it is because it is the rationalization of European fears rather than a possible fact, or a convincing argument.

The most pointed criticism of Atlantic policies has been voiced, during the last few months, in *Le monde,* by Etienne Gilson, the scholar, and Hubert Beuve Mery, the editor of the paper. Whereas Gilson has even recently insisted on the notion that French and European neutrality, the constitution of a kind of international Third Force, could be a way of softening the rigors of the cold war, Beuve Mery, on his part, has never appealed to such a notion. In any case, both Gilson's and Beuve Mery's arguments can be expressed without having recourse to the theory of neutrality. Fundamentally, Gilson's position consists of one simple statement: "France must have a (foreign) policy corresponding to its means." In other words, rearmament is

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ruinous, hence France cannot follow American policy unconditionally. To this, Gilson added a series of polemical points, some good and some bad, but in any case not connected by a consistent theory.

As for Beuve Mery, he is both less querulous and more aware of the general aspects of the situation than Gilson. In an article published last December, he maintained that from the point of view of the West, the cold war can only have a defensive character, since the West has no ideology to impose on anybody, but simply wants to defend its democratic institutions against armed totalitarianism. This defensive character, Beuve Mery argued, requires defensive tactics. In other words, Europe cannot disarm the Communist fifth column and face the chaos of a Third World War except in the case of an open armed aggression on the part of Stalin. To risk global war for Korea, or for German rearmament, or simply for fear of "another Munich" would be folly, according to the editor of *Le monde*.

To dismiss such arguments by simply classifying them as "defeatist" is frivolous. Insofar as this kind of criticism makes sense, it must be met, especially since it undoubtedly expresses a state of mind which is widespread. What can legitimately be opposed to Gilson's and Beuve Mery's arguments is not the fact that they are "demoralizing," but that they leave too much out of the picture, namely not only France's and Europe's dependence on America, but their divisions and their internal disorder. If, by a miracle, a united Western Europe came into being tomorrow this would represent such a radical change for the better in the general situation that the question of "neutrality" would simply disappear, together with the mood of helplessness that creates it. Europe, that is, would have a policy. But as long as Europe remains in the present sad state, "neutrality" is both another name for impotence, and a fantastic dream.

"Neutrality" reveals its real character as a substitute for internal political life in the case of Claude Bourdet and his weekly, *L'observateur*. This paper is a sorry mixture of hesitant anti-Communism, Trotskyist dogmatism, and fellow traveling. It has a circulation of 20,000 copies, which means a considerable audience. Polemics aside, the position of Claude Bourdet on neutralism is as follows: by declaring ourselves neutralists (that is, opposed to American imperialism) we will put Stalinism on the spot; by putting Stalinism on the spot, we will provoke a kind of generalized Titoism out of which a new European Left will be born. Neutralism moreover implies the refusal to rearm (except on such a scale as Switzerland), the liquidation of colonial liabilities, and, of course, a planned economy.

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At this point, everything becomes clear. Bourdet's whole construction is based on the postulate that the non-existence of serious political ferment in present-day France is *caused* by the cold war. Once a declaration of independence from the cold war had been broadcast, things would start moving again, thinks Bourdet. Which amounts to saying that, in order to influence domestic policies, you must first force a change in foreign policy, and, in order to change foreign policy, you must start radical internal reforms. Here "neutralism" is used as a slogan for the masses by people who have no masses.

Nicola Chiaromonte

II

NOTES ON THE LITERARY SITUATION

The literary prizes in France this year were awarded amidst more than the usual amount of grousing by established critics. In his weekly column in the *Figaro littéraire,* André Rousseaux commented acidly, shortly before the prizes were given out, that "the literary prize week in France is, in my opinion, a phenomenon in the history of modern manners related to the sweepstakes or the Tour de France" (the annual bicycle race around France). "One sees books pop up whose relations with literature of quality are so tenuous that they almost defy inspection." After this unpromising prelude, Rousseaux proceeded to knock off the leading contenders for the prizes in a couple of biting paragraphs each—and remarked, in conclusion, "we shall return next Saturday to serious matters."[1]

Nonetheless, the prize-giving was enlivened by a sizzling exchange of insults between Hervé Bazin—a young novelist whose three books have attracted considerable attention—and Maurice Nadeau, the literary critic of the newspaper *Combat* and the author of a useful *Histoire du Surréalisme.* There was a good deal of talk about Bazin getting

1. For purposes of information, the prize-winners are as follows. Prix Goncourt: *Les jeux sauvages,* by Paul Colin. Prix Femina: *La femme sans passe,* by Serge Groussard. Prix Renaudot: *Les orgues de l'enfer,* by Pierre Molaine.

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one of the prizes (he didn't), and Nadeau decided to nip this in the bud by a vicious attack in *Combat*. Bazin replied in *Le canard enchaîné*, the Parisian satirical weekly—praising Nadeau for his "inspired commentary" on Rimbaud's *La chasse spirituelle* (a fake Rimbaud text at which, last year, Nadeau had bitten hook, line, and sinker), and nominating Nadeau for a non-existent *Prix Modique* to be awarded to critics with no special gifts whatsoever. The pay-off came when Bazin's publisher bought an ad in *Combat* that forced out Nadeau's weekly column. The ad said, in effect: "Everybody has read the brilliant and important article of Maurice Nadeau on Hervé Bazin. Now read Bazin's novels."

No complaint was registered from any quarter, however (except perhaps from the Stalinists, though I haven't been reading their publications regularly), when the city of Paris gave its annual literary prize to Jean Paulhan. Each year Paris rotates the award to go to a different literary genre; this year was an essayist's turn and Paulhan was voted with almost no opposition. Little known to the average French reader, Jean Paulhan is even less well known outside of France; but he is certainly one of the most influential living French men of letters. He took over the editorship of the *Nouvelle revue française* after the death of Jacques Rivière, he now edits the *Cahiers de la Pléiade*, and he is, besides, the chief literary adviser of Gallimard—the *eminence grise* of modern French literature, as the French papers always call him. He has written comparatively little, and his most important work, *Les fleurs de Tarbes*, was published in 1941.

This book is an attack—though attack is too strong a word for Paulhan's critical manner—on what Paulhan calls the "Terror"; this is the critical theory that considers the conventions of language (or rhetoric) to exercise a mysterious power over writers, rendering them incapable of expressing new ideas or new experiences. Most of French criticism from the Romantics on has been dominated by this notion, as Paulhan proves by copious quotations (and not only French criticism, one might add); but Paulhan shows how little sense this theory makes when examined on its own terms rather than accepted as an assumption so evident that it doesn't have to be argued about. So far as Paulhan goes his book is highly effective, though the truth is that he doesn't go very far—or very deep. Paulhan's manner tends to be somewhat pixyish; he circles around his problems, delicately sticking pins into other people's balloons but hardly doing much else. Stylistically, he affects the sophisticated-innocent air, naively asking just the right questions with a modest air of sincere wonderment—the questions that are sure to

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show up the reply, whatever it may be, as completely ludicrous. The French do this sort of thing well and Paulhan is no exception.

While the younger generation of novelists haven't been able to arouse much critical enthusiasm, two books by older writers have appeared recently that are worth noting. Julian Green brought out a new novel called *Moïra* that is of particular interest to an American reader since it is set in an American university (obviously the University of Virginia) in the early 'twenties; it is supposed to be a psychological study, in Green's suavely conventional manner, of backwoods American Protestantism. The hero is a Thomas Wolfe character from a hill village, intensely religious, who ends up by murdering the campus vamp after she has done him the favor of seducing him. That's American Protestantism for you, one can hear Julian Green exclaiming in despair!—though he inexplicably writes in a preface that "the Protestants I have dramatized in no way express my opinion of Protestantism." I have no particular interest in defending Protestantism against Julian Green, who was converted to Catholicism not so long ago, but one can't help asking just *whose* opinion of Protestantism these characters represent?

Anyway, from a literary point of view, the book seems misbegotten to my American eyes. I have never been a great admirer of Thomas Wolfe's elephantiasis of the imagination, but I realized, while reading *Moïra,* that Wolfe's provincial people need a certain epic quality to do them justice. What sticks out in *Moïra* is the incongruity between the main character—the elemental violence of his religious and emotional conflicts, the monumentality even of his *gaucherie*—and the delicate fragility of Julian Green's style and psychological approach: the approach of a novelistic tradition developed to explore highly refined and highly civilized states of consciousness. It is as if Watteau or Fragonard tried to do Michelangelo's *Moses* in the style suitable for one of their *Fêtes champêtres* or *Voyages à Cythere.* The result is that Julian Green's main character seems a preliminary sketch for a figure who never shows up in his true dimensions. Also, I might add that I find it hard to believe that any American students—even those at the University of Virginia in the early twenties—ever felt, thought or acted like those in *Moïra.*

The other novel, by Georges Bernanos, is a posthumous publication. Brought out under the title *Un mauvais rêve,* the book has a curious history, having been reconstructed by Albert Béguin from notebooks and uncompleted manuscripts tracked down from as far away as Rio de Janeiro. The entire second part of the novel was originally written as

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the end of Bernanos' earlier book, *Un crime,* but he chopped this section out and wrote a new one for *Un crime* because he had agreed to write a detective story and the editor became worried when Bernanos really got interested in his characters. His letters indicated that he then started to write a new novel based upon this fragment, and at the end of 1935 he remarked that *Un mauvais rêve* was practically finished. As it stands, though, the book is jerky and disjointed, obviously not a completed work; nor does Béguin explain satisfactorily why Bernanos, who was always short of cash, didn't publish the book if he had a completed manuscript in 1935. But if the book doesn't hang together, it's nonetheless a series of extraordinary portraits—an emotionally exhausted writer, once endowed with a Balzacian vitality, driving himself to keep overproducing and drawing inspiration from the poisoned imagination of his secretary; the secretary herself, drug addict, pathological liar and eventually murderess, but obsessed with a need to turn her dreams—her bad dreams, *mauvais rêves*—into terrible reality; two foppish young French intellectuals, one of whom commits suicide after flirting with the Commies and anarchists. Particularly the second part of the book, recounting the murder of an old lady by the secretary (this was the section that the editor felt didn't fit the detective story because "the tone changed") has an hallucinatory quality almost worthy of Dostoevsky.

The vogue of Existentialism in France has had many incalculable effects, ranging from a Hegel Renaissance at the Sorbonne to the cellar night clubs (*caveaus*) clustered in the St. Germain des Prés area, where the joint is always jumping with American jazz—or its sometimes not-too-recognizable facsimile. Besides all this, Existentialism has also produced what French critics dramatically call *une crise du roman.* Jean-Paul Sartre discovered one day that everybody was *en situation* and couldn't get out of his or her own point of view; this led Sartre, as far back as 1938, to call Dos Passos the greatest living writer because Dos Passos' technique was a novelistic counterpart of Existentialist metaphysics; and since that time the younger French critics have been worrying about the defects of their own novels, where an omniscient observer too often reflects a fixed framework of values that nobody believes in any more. This is one reason for the vogue in France of *le roman américain,* and it's the one that may turn out to have most value in the future; for it has set the new generation of French critics to thinking about the problems of the novel in a philosophical perspective. One of the most gifted of these critics is Claude-Edmonde Magny, who has just brought out the first volume of a *Histoire du roman français*

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depuis 1918, and who, several years back, published a series of critical studies of the American novel under the title *L'Age du roman américain.*

The nub of this latter book is roughly that the various technical innovations of the American novel—analyzed in the works of Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck and Dos Passos, not to forget the ever-present Dashiell Hammett—are a direct reflection of the metaphysical predicament of modern man; our time is the age of the American novel. Despite this suggestive approach, I don't think a literate American will find much in the book that he doesn't already know—except perhaps that the University of Montana is in Idaho, as Magny carefully explains to the French reader. And it's curious, to say the least, to see her working away at a theological interpretation of Faulkner largely because he called one of his novels *Sanctuary.* Incidentally, it's sadly typical of the French approach to things American that Magny doesn't refer to any American writer or critic who has written on the American novel (there is one lone reference to Harry Levin's book on Joyce, which has been translated into French). On the other hand, Magny is a far cry from the academic French *américainistes* who solemnly discuss a great master like Louis Bromfield, and who have already labeled Truman Capote the head of a new neo-Romantic (?) school. And Magny's book is worth reading if only because, along with Sartre's early reviews in *Situations I,* it's the best introduction, on a respectable critical level, to the current French furore about the American novel.

In writing on the modern French novel, of course, Magny is on much more familiar territory, and if her succeeding volumes are on the level of the first one, I think her book may well be a major critical achievement. Here, she has excellent chapters on Mauriac, Giraudoux, Proust, Gide, Valéry (*M. Teste*) and Roger Martin du Gard, as well as shorter discussions of minor writers like Jean Schlumberger and Jacques Rivière. Magny's point of view is largely that of Sartre's in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*—Marxist in what it rejects (bourgeois values, a literature of "gratuity"), Existentialist in what it advocates (the creation of new values, vaguely Socialist, a "permanent revolution," God knows what all!). But Magny is more interested in literature than Sartre, whose criticism, as she rightly remarks, tends to neglect "the intrinsic content of a work" (the same criticism can be made of Magny's own book on the American novel). It doesn't apply, though, to her later book, where she makes a real effort to get at the metaphysical center of each writer's universe. I thought specially good, though perhaps a trifle oversubtle, the sections on Gide and Valéry, where the problem of the novel as an art form gets special attention.

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I can't resist, however, pointing out once again the provincialism to which even the best French critics are prone. Writing on the problem of perspectives in the novel, Magny says: "Gide's critical reflection had made him infinitely scrupulous on this point: with his friend Martin du Gard he is, perhaps, the first novelist who systematically made an effort to bring coherence into the conventions of the novel, hitherto so disorderly and contradictory." Just after reading these lines I had occasion to pass the Closerie des Lilas at the intersection of Boulevard Montparnasse and Saint-Michel; its discreetly peach-colored lights, shining through genteel Victorian curtains, reminded me that it was supposed to have been Henry James's favorite restaurant in Paris. I thought of the Master who had written *The Art of the Novel,* and wondered what he might have said if he could have read the sentence I have just quoted. No doubt he would have expressed himself in some elaborately polite circumlocution, since after all a lady *is* involved; but he could hardly have repressed feeling, as he might have put it himself, the first fine felicity of righteous wrath.

Equally under Sartre's influence is Roger Stéphane, the author of a semi-literary, semi-political book called *Portrait de l'aventurier.* Through a comparison of the works (and lives) of T. E. Lawrence, André Malraux and a German novelist, Ernst von Salomon, Stéphane tries to define the psychology of the adventurer, the intellectual as man of action. The adventurer, according to Stéphane, is never totally committed to any cause he may adopt; he acts to affirm himself rather than out of belief in some goal to be attained; and regardless of who wins the adventurer is doomed to defeat. He can only find himself at the moment of action, when he identifies himself with others, but he knows, only too well, the ultimate vanity of all human action. The book, I think, touches on something crucial, though it seems to have been ripped off far too hastily to say anything definitive. Moreover, Stéphane is so anti-Malraux that he makes a glaring misinterpretation of *Man's Fate,* whose theme is just this contrast between the anarchist-adventurer Tchen and the good CP functionary Kyo Gisors, who obeys orders that he knows are misguided and suicidal. Stéphane, in the interests of his thesis, writes as if Tchen represents Malraux's point of view.

Stéphane's book, which has a preface by Sartre, has been widely noticed in the French press, and nothing I've read discloses so well the dilemma of *avant-garde* thinking over here. Like any Stalinist, Stéphane is suspicious of the adventurer's unwillingness to abandon himself, as an individual, to some limited social goal; yet as an Existentialist, he feels

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the eternal validity of the adventurer's revolt against *la condition humaine*. Sartre stresses this dilemma by comparing the adventurer to the militant, the good Party man, who has no personality because, in theory, he knows himself only in terms of the Party. Sartre says: "I would want the adventurer to be really defeated, that is, I want the militant to win: it's only justice that the militant triumph (and besides, it conforms to the historical process)." But he adds: " . . . after having applauded the victory of the militant, I would follow the adventurer into his solitude." Why? Because the adventurer "bears testimony at one and the same time to the absolute existence of man and his absolute impossibility." It's this kind of thing, translated on a day-to-day political level, that accounts for the grip that "neutralism" has on Sartre and his followers. Torn between a blind faith in the historical process and the absolute existence of man in freedom—not being able to have both, except in the bewildering sleight-of-hand of their dialectic—they choose neither in concrete political terms.

No literary letter from Paris these days would be complete without some mention of the latest intellectual fad—occultism. The most recent literary movement that was any fun, *Lettrisme,* fizzled very quickly (the *lettristes* believed that words in poetry don't have to make sense, since only the sound of the letters is important). Occultism has now taken its place, but I'm afraid that it's no laughing matter; the best all-round French literary magazine, *La table ronde,* had a special occultist issue last fall and its success was so great that the issue had to be reprinted.

What's all the fuss about? Well, not being an *initié* I really don't have a very clear idea, but the way for occultism seems to have been cleared by Surrealism, with its attempt to make poetry a source of supernatural knowledge, and also by the studies made of occult influences in writers like Balzac, Baudelaire, Nerval, Rimbaud and Mallarmé. This has been combined with all sorts of Oriental and Hindu lore, *à la* Aldous Huxley, as well as the influence of a French writer who died in Egypt a couple of months ago, René Guenon. Guenon was a convert to Islam, and so far as I can gather has done some valuable scholarly work on Oriental mysticism; but he also wrote a good bit on the occult Tradition (with a capital T) that, in his opinion, lies behind all the great religions, and which has come down to us poor moderns only in garbled snatches. His little book on this subject, *La crise du monde moderne,* can be seen everywhere, and Gallimard—never a publisher to be left behind—has started to publish a new series of books on occultism called *Tradition.*

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All this stuff is pretty deadly, and one wonders what's coming next when a book like Raymond Abellio's *La Bible, document chiffré* succeeds in getting seriously reviewed. The ineffable Abellio—believe it or not!—had a revelation on Good Friday in 1946; this disclosed to him that every Hebrew letter in the Pentateuch has a numerical value and that the secrets of the universe will be revealed by working out the relationships of these numbers (predestination was certainly at work here, since Abellio is a former student of the Ecole Polytechnique). Abellio has been going at it hammer and tongs ever since. I think a non-occultist reader will understand why, after wading through enough of this junk, I felt like writing a note of thanks to Marcel Jouhandeau, who began his contribution to *La table ronde* in this way: "In 1927-28 I was very much taken up with magic and occultism. I'm infinitely grateful that my marriage turned my attention away from these subjects."

To the credit of *La table ronde,* let it be noted that they printed a delicious little parody of Abellio in a later issue, complete with phony references to Dionysius the Areopagite, Paracelsus and the Sepher Yetzirah. Jacques Laurent, the author of this piece, sets out to prove that Hector Malot—a French Ben Ames Williams of the nineteenth century—was really *un grand initié,* and that by the proper mathematical mystifications his novel *Sans famille* can be seen as a revelation of the Law. After having calculated that the first phrase of the first sentence of this novel works out to the number: 69, Laurent proceeds to give the following occult interpretation. "Nobody," he says, "is ignorant of the importance of this number-symbol in the Orphic tradition. Whether one is satisfied with the tendency of the disciples of Eliphas Levi, who relate it to Chaos, or whether one refers to the commentator of the *Book of the Dead,* the fact remains that the operation it represents implies, above all, Silence."

And while I am on this occult level, I should not neglect to inform PR readers of the latest appearance in print of a world-famous writer—considered by some the greatest writer who ever committed his sentiments to language; though in recent times, it grieves me to note, his very existence has been seriously questioned. No, I'm not talking about Shakespeare, whose works, in any event, can hardly boast of having been the source of so much controversy, not to say confusion and turmoil. The writer I am alluding to is, plainly and simply, God Almighty, who contributed a touching little piece recently to *Le canard enchainé.* It seems that another weekly, *Opéra,* ran a symposium called: Why I Believe in God, and François Mauriac and Paul Claudel answered at some length. In a true spirit of Christian humility, the

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editors of *Le canard enchaîné* wondered whether this feeling was reciprocal; whether, to put it bluntly, God believed in François Mauriac and Paul Claudel. The answer, I am happy to report, is unequivocal (which is more than can be said for some previous utterances emanating from this same source). "I believe in Mauriac and Claudel," the article ran, "first, because They exist. And don't let anybody try to deny it in front of me: *Figaro* once a week and the Comédie Française once a year take it upon themselves to furnish me irrefutable proofs of Their existence." And in what is perhaps the first commitment of this writer to literary criticism, he remarks that Paul Claudel's *Soulier de Satan* "is still the only thing, to this day, which has been able to give me an idea of the infinite."

Joseph Frank

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BOOKS

THE FABULOUS EXAMPLE OF ANDRÉ GIDE

TWO LEGENDS: OEDIPUS AND THESEUS. By André Gide. Translated from the French by John Russell. Alfred A. Knopf. $3.00.

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE. Vol. IV: 1939-1949. Translated from the French by Justin O'Brien. Alfred A. Knopf. $6.00.

Gide himself wisely suggested that his play about Oedipus and his short novel about Theseus be published in one volume. The play was written in 1930, and the second work twelve years after. Thus the difference in time of composition is one of the fascinations of this volume, for the two works taken together make possible a comparison of two stages in Gide's long development as an artist and as a moralist.

Oedipus, at present the most famous of all literary characters, appears in both works, and his meeting with Theseus is an astonishing sequel to the view of him which Gide presents in his play. And the two works, in one book, make possible the kind of illuminating comparison which is one of the important reasons for the inexhaustible vitality and veritable immortality of classical mythology. We can hardly avoid comparing Gide's Oedipus with Sophocles' plays about the tragic hero, with the Freudian use of the myth, with Jean Cocteau's different modern interpretation of Oedipus in *The Infernal Machine,* and with his other manifestations. Then there is the extraordinary contrast between Gide's Theseus, and the Theseus of Euripides and Racine. Both the play and the novel make a rich use of these parallels and variations, and they are also full of sly hints, allusions and innuendoes directed at the reader who knows Gide's career. For example, Gide tells us that one of Oedipus' sons has written two books. These books have almost the same titles as two books by French disciples of Gide. And both sons are accused by Oedipus of having misunderstood his teachings. This is a colossal joke, but a somewhat limited and local one.

Yet neither work depends upon such tricks, nor need the reader who does not recognize them be at a loss. Gide's Oedipus is very interesting in himself, and the play is intelligible apart from any external reference. Like so many of Gide's heroes, Oedipus is a disciple of the author, a being who declares that he believes only in himself, who wishes to dis-

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cover some new form of unhappiness to astonish the gods, and who takes pride in not knowing his parents. When he finds out that his two sons wish to make love to their sisters, he reproaches them not as immoral, but as lacking in noble ambition, a view of incest which is not meant to shock the reader but to illustrate the exalted and discriminating nature of Gide's gospel of self-realization. In the same way, Gide's Oedipus is not horrified to learn that he has committed parricide and incest, for the gods have tricked him into committing these crimes. What does horrify him, appall him, and make him say that he must "awake from happiness" is the discovery of the abyss of his ignorance. This is an unbearable humiliation because he is a man who has taken great pride in his knowledge, his self-knowledge above all. He has delighted in himself as a self-made, self-reliant being who conquered the Sphinx by knowing that Man, human nature, and one's self were the passwords, the key and the answer to all dangers and enigmas. Hence his tragedy is the recognition that his happiness and success have been based on ignorance and self-deception, and not, as he had supposed, on knowledge and independence. There is every reason to suppose that this interpretation of Oedipus is Gide's effort in old age to criticize the doctrines of self-fulfillment on which his career had been based.

The weakness of the play, considered solely as a play, is that the characters tend to talk about moral principles and ideas instead of dramatizing them, a temptation to which most authors who are interested in ideas succumb. Both Broadway and Henry James warn of the danger, the former with the iron rule, "Don't tell 'em, show 'em," and the latter by speaking of "the platitude of mere statement." In Gide's case, as in Shaw's, however, the dramatic poverty does not matter too much because he knows how to make his ideas intensely interesting in themselves.

Gide's Theseus tells the story of his life in the first person, after his exploits have been accomplished. But the deeds which in the classic authors had been represented as heroic or noble now appear as the underhand tricks of a benign Machiavellian who takes nothing, not even himself, seriously, and who is cunning, cocky, sophisticated, and quite smug. He thinks everyone else is slightly ridiculous, particularly Daedalus and Icarus, who, it now turns out, wanted to have wings not to fly but to solve philosophical problems. And the labyrinth in which Theseus conquers the Minotaur is transformed by Gide into a charming garden: Theseus' heroism consists in refusing to permit pleasure itself, however enchanting, to distract him from what he regards as success. So too when an old friend argues with him about the founding of Athens and says: "Mankind isn't worth all this trouble," his characteristic reply

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is: "Well, what else is there to think about except mankind?"—which, however realistic, is hardly the answer and the tone of a devout humanist and democrat.

Of the two, Oedipus emerges as the truly noble hero who has surpassed himself. In Gide's novel the two characters meet after both have endured a great deal, and they exchange their studied views of existence. Oedipus declares that he has been trying to "break through to reality," and that he now believes in original sin, redemption through suffering, and the existence of an inner world compared to which the world of the living who are not blind is a deceitful illusion. Theseus congratulates Oedipus on having made "good use of his misfortunes," and then cynically congratulates himself on being other than Oedipus, shrewd enough to have other views, sensible enough to make practical and political use of Oedipus' religious beliefs.

In an interesting introduction to this volume, John Russell declares that Theseus resembles Goethe, Paul Valèry, and Gide himself. To the present reviewer, Theseus seems a complacent and hardened egotist quite unlike those great authors, whatever their shortcomings. But it may well be that a variety of interpretation is precisely Gide's ironic intention. Such an ironic intention can be too clever, and certainly there are passages where Gide indulges in cleverness for its own sake. The possible or probable meaningfulness of both interpretations may thus be Gide's acceptance, through the figure of Theseus, of the limitations of humanity; or it may be a systematic ambiguity directed at the reader, as if Gide said: Sincere or hypocrite reader, you must judge Theseus in terms of what *you* are.

On the whole, and however we interpret the text, *Theseus* is a little masterpiece. And of both the play and the novel we must say what Gide's Antigone says of herself: "Not a word comes to my lips that has not first been in my heart." But of course we must never forget that it is Gide's complex heart.

The fourth volume of Gide's journals would not require attention in the pages of *Partisan Review* (its readers are certainly aware by now of how important this work in its entirety is), were it not for two distressing phenomena. One is the interpretation of passages in this new volume as a demonstration that Gide was a collaborationist or at least ambiguous for a time in his attitude toward the German occupation of France in 1940. The second phenomenon, which is linked with the first, is the use of Gide as a scapegoat whose sins and shortcomings are representative of the weakness and the wrongness of modern literature.

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In this way, by one of the curious and persistent logical leaps which are characteristic of the *rhetoric* of literary criticism, it is suggested that Gide shows how wrong, limited, and defective were Joyce, Mann, Proust, Kafka, T. S. Eliot, and practically every modernist author.

Now even if Gide had been a collaborationist, which he certainly was not, neither his creative work nor that of his compeers would be in the least impugned. Thomas Mann appears to be a misguided and well-meaning author who "collaborates" with Stalinism, while during the first World War he apparently was a confused reactionary or a German patriot, one or the other, depending on the reader's own bias, benevolence, or malevolence. The Joseph books and *The Magic Mountain* remain masterpieces, despite the author's foolish political opinions. It is unfortunately true that political insight does not coincide with literary genius; and although we may venture to think that, since the knowledge of reality which literature requires is in part a knowledge of politics, ultimately literature has serious political meanings, nevertheless this is not at all the same kind of knowledge of political reality which is necessary at the ballot-box or when France has just been occupied and conquered by Germany. Again, to use a second example, T. S. Eliot is a self-confessed reactionary and he is a very great poet and there is a good deal of political and social feeling in his poetry. But we can't conclude, as some have, that he is not a great poet because he is a reactionary any more than we can conclude, as others have, that since he is a great poet, political reaction is justified. It would be quite pleasant if life, literature, and politics were simple enough to allow for these easy judgments and connections, but they are not as simple as all that; they are clearly very complicated.

Gide was a very complicated human being, and his journal shows how for fifty years he wrestled with the labyrinthine complications of his being, self-doubting, self-questioning, self-tormented and above all honest. During the occupation of France, immediately after the Vichy régime had been installed, he was naturally despondent about the future of his country. But he had as always the courage of his confusion. On the 14th of June 1940 he wrote in his journal that Petain's speech was "admirable," because Petain praised effort and discipline, and condemned the arrogance of victory involved in the Treaty of Versailles. On the 24th of June 1940, his journal entry reads: "Yesterday evening we heard with amazement Petain's new speech on the radio. Can it be? Did Petain himself deliver it? Freely? One suspects some infamous deceit. How can one speak of France as 'intact' after handing over to the enemy over half of the country? How make these words fit those

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noble words he pronounced three days ago? How can one fail to approve Churchill? And not subscribe most heartily to General De Gaulle's declaration?"

During the following months, Gide continued to waver and grope in the darkness of the time. By the 8th of January 1941, he was writing in his journal of his own efforts at adjusting himself to the occupation and attempting as ever to explain himself to himself (the reader ought to bear in mind that anyone less honest than Gide would have felt free to suppress or conceal pages in which he reveals his own easily misinterpreted and painful sentiments). Seeking to explain how he came to contribute to a periodical which the Vichy régime permitted to appear, he wrote: "My contributing to the review, the *Feuillets* I gave to it, the very plan of resuming publication—all that goes back to the period of dejection immediately following the defeat. Not only was resistance not yet organized, but I did not even think it possible. To fight against the inescapable seemed to me useless, so that all my efforts at first tried to find wisdom in submission, and within my distress to right at least my thoughts." Ten months after the June 14, 1940, entry, on March 30, 1941, when the meaning of a passive submission to Vichy became clear to him (and long before military events in the least suggested that Germany would ultimately be defeated), he denounced a book by Jacques Chardonne[1] advocating collaboration, published an explicit and unequivocal attack on it, and wrote in his journal: "I am reading with amazement and dismay Chardonne's book . . . that sort of facile superiority . . . comes closer to revolting than enchanting me. . . . Yet I am grateful to Chardonne for having written this book which leaves everything in doubt except himself. . . . This book provokes a reaction in me, for as I read it I feel clearly that this position is at the opposite pole from the one I must and will take; and it is important for me to declare it at once. My mind is only too inclined by nature to acceptance; but as soon as acceptance becomes advantageous or profitable, I am suspicious. An instinct warns me that I cannot accept being with them on 'the right side'; I am on the other."

These lengthy quotations are made necessary by the fact that one distinguished critic in a review of this volume of the journals has cited entries which, when isolated from the rest of the book, seem to justify the assertion that Gide was not really opposed to Nazism. This political

1. In Justin O'Brien's glossary to this volume of the journals, we learn that Chardonne was elected to L'Academie Française in 1950. This is a beautiful example of having one's cake served up by whoever happens to be in power. It also casts a peculiar light on the political critics of Gide.

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deficiency is then connected with Gide's idea of culture and indeed his entire career, as if a few months' behavior were an adequate sample and trial of a lifetime's dedication to culture, morality, and humanity. The process of using an author's political opinions as a criterion of his work ought to be left to those who are interested solely in politics: totalitarian politics.

There is much more to be said of Gide's journals and Gide's entire work as representative of all the virtues and limitations of modern literature. The limitations are real enough and nothing is gained by denying them or overlooking the necessary task of attempting to transcend them. But it is just as false to forget the virtues, and to overemphasize the limitations. There are always a sufficient number of philistines and middlebrows to remind us of the limitations while ignoring the virtues. And it is always tempting to listen to the sweet nothings of the *Zeitgeist* (that fickle, promiscuous, fancy lady who is so often getting married, divorced, and compromised). Any examination of Gide's work, his journals, and his idea of culture must include the valor with which he repudiated the Soviet Union, the strong and fruitful criticism he made of French colonial imperialism after visiting the Congo, his ceaseless effort to enlarge and extend the borders of sensibility and consciousness by learning foreign languages and studying foreign literatures. At the same time, bearing in mind these virtues, we ought also to remember his weakness as a genuine novelist, the limitation involved in making sexual inversion the most important of moral problems or the symbol of moral freedom, and the errors in literary taste and sensibility which are at least in part the consequence of an omnivorous study of literature: such errors as his overestimation of Edmund Gosse, Pearl S. Buck, John Steinbeck, Dashiell Hammett, and many others.

When we think of Gide reading Milton in the moonlight in the French Congo, we must also think of how this literary pursuit in Africa was matched by his equal perception of the social injustice which prevailed about him and which he did much to make public. He was full of humility about his friend and peer, Paul Valèry; he was contrite, remorseful, and noble in acknowledging his failure, at first, to recognize Proust's genius; he was candid about and critical of his anti-Semitic emotions. He experienced to the full the attitude of the artist isolated from society and pursuing art for art's sake, just as he lived out and lived through the problem of the individual's moral freedom and moral justification; and just as he experienced with his whole being the burden and bewilderment of the author who attempts to find out what his social responsibilities are, as an author and as a human being.

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If there are greater authors in the future, it will be partly the result of Gide's example and the knowledge of both his virtues and his shortcomings. There have been greater authors in our own era, but none can be said to be as fully and as adequately a witness to the truth about the apocalyptic period between 1870 and 1950: a living and marvelously articulate witness to the truth, despite enormous handicaps which would have silenced most men; despite fears, anxieties, and various other psychological disabilities; and most difficult of all, various social pressures, whether Catholic or Communist, which have made many another gifted author feel that it was not dishonest to be silent, indifferent, prudent, careful, and in the end incapable of distinguishing between patience and opportunism.

Gide is representative and he is a symbol. It is certainly fair enough that those who have serious doubts about modern literature as a whole should make his work the subject of the most careful examination. But the partial repudiation of modern literature which is now so fashionable would be more convincing if the critics and readers who participate in it were all devoutly reading and rereading Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Balzac, Flaubert, Shakespeare and Sophocles; and drawing their standards of judgment from the great works which belong to a period prior to our own; and demonstrating that Proust's faults became clear when one had judged him in comparison with Tolstoy, Stendhal, and the author or editor of *The Iliad*.

Perhaps it is in the light of such studied comparisons—such a saturation in the experience of literature—that the authors of the twentieth century are being repudiated. But if this is the true reason, it has not been made explicit by the critics who declare that the time for a new revaluation and a partial rejection has arrived. Meanwhile in the great world itself many momentous cultural changes are occurring and perhaps this too has something to do with the new doubts about modern literature. If these cultural changes are troubling the doubtful readers and critics, one can only conclude that they are not troubled enough:[2] they are carping; they are cultivating subtle qualifications and reservations in the face of what may very well be an overwhelming change.

For it must be admitted that, in a way, after all, the classics are best sellers and hits right now. *Kiss Me Kate* has enjoyed a longer run than any other play by Shakespeare, with or without music, and we can

2. It is certainly true that you can't fool all the readers all the time. But all the time is a long time to wait.

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certainly expect all of Shakespeare's plays to become musical comedies soon enough, a phenomenon which should make the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lion roar: *Ars gratia artis,* which, as everyone knows, means Art for the sake of the Almighty Dollar. Mr. W. Somerset Maugham has helped by editing Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and others, so that the discursive and "uninteresting" passages in their masterpieces would not be present to irritate and bore the hurried reader. And the supreme dragon of television, which may transform motion-picture palaces into bare ruined choirs where late Bing Crosby sang, can very well make any doubts or hesitations about modern literature irrelevant or meaningless. Just as *Gulliver's Travels* became a children's book, *As You Like It, Hamlet, King Lear,* and *Oedipus Rex* may eventually appear as comic books. Sooner or later, moreover, no one will have to read anything at all: everything will be on the television scream. Television scripts will be written by those who have spent their happy childhoods looking at television performances, and then there will obviously be no need whatever any longer to discuss the virtues and the limitations of Gide and of modern literature.

Delmore Schwartz

THE PRAGMATIC HERO

THE LETTERS OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT: THE YEARS OF PREPARATION, 1868-1900. Edited by Elting E. Morison. Harvard University Press. 2 volumes. $20.

"These, then, are my last words to you," said William James to the Harvard chapter of the Young Men's Christian Association in 1895: "Be not afraid of life. Believe that life *is* worth living, and your belief will help create the fact." He was expressing what would become a basic aspect of the ethics of pragmatism; he was expressing too what was, on many levels, a characteristic faith of his time—the faith in the capacity of the will to achieve anything. Orison Swett Marden's *Pushing to the Front: or Success under Difficulties* had begun its enormous popular success the year before; William Makepeace Thayer's *Turning Points in Successful Careers* was published the same year. They all praised the "iron will." "Life," said Marden, "is what we make it. . . . Give a youth resolution and the alphabet, and who shall place limits to his career?" James called it "the will to believe" and Marden

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"the will to succeed": strictly, they were talking about quite different things, but in a significant sense too they were interpreting a central impulse of the times. The great exponent of this impulse in practice was Theodore Roosevelt.

For Theodore Roosevelt his whole life—his style of personality, his very physique—was a triumph of the will. He was a spindly boy, nearsighted and asthmatic, interested in reading and in the study of nature; but his physical weakness, he came to feel, invited aggression; so he remade himself by sheer force of will, teaching himself to ride and box and be tough. "I went in for boxing and wrestling a good deal," he writes in a letter of 1900, "and I really think that while this was partly because I liked them as sports, it was even more because I intended to be a middling decent fellow, and I did not intend that anyone should laugh at me with impunity because I was decent." A deep interior anxiety made him forever apprehensive over the possibility of ridicule; a deep interior violence shaped his response.

He thus redesigned his personality; he wanted to do good and feared being a sissy, and this was his solution. "My ordinary companions in college would I think have had a tendency to look down upon me for doing Sunday school work if I had not also been a corking boxer, a good runner, and a genial member of the Porcellian Club." But Roosevelt did not stop at being a muscular Christian, given to pugilism and good works; he had a large vision. "It is exactly the same thing with history," he continues in a strikingly characteristic vein. "In most countries the 'Bourgeoisie'—the moral, respectable, commercial, middle class—is looked upon with a certain contempt which is justified by their timidity and unwarlikeness. But the minute a middle class produces men like Hawkins and Frobisher on the seas, or men such as the average Union soldier in the civil war, it acquires the hearty respect of others."

This introduces the second theme in the life of Roosevelt: the dilemma of an aristocrat in a plutocracy. It obsessed his historical speculation, dominated his politics and colored his personal relations. He hated "the commercial and cheap altruistic spirit, the spirit of the Birmingham school, the spirit of the banker, the broker, the mere manufacturer, and mere merchant"; he detested "the stock-jobbing timidity, the Baboo kind of statesmanship, which is clamored for . . . by the men who put monetary gain before national honor." Possessing himself the security of family and status, he was deeply affronted by the domination in society of the men of business.

This was, of course, a predicament of the highest importance in the intellectual life of late nineteenth-century America. The descendants

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of the mild, settled and relatively cultured men of wealth of the pre-Civil War period now found themselves confronted by the crude and fierce world of the "robber barons." Their varied responses to this new world supplied pervading themes for the writing and behavior of the time. James Russell Lowell sought refuge in good old books; Henry Adams in cynicism and disillusion; Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., in skepticism and detachment; Henry James, Jr., in Europe. For all of them, a sense of affirmative social function had waned, yet they would not yield to the new forces. Others yielded, and became the agents, the front men, the sages and instructors for the new masters.

Of those who would neither yield nor seek refuge, who sought to confront their predicament squarely and directly, William James and Theodore Roosevelt were clearly the most successful. Both their reputations have suffered perhaps as a result; their very attempts to come to terms with their times produced in each a certain jocosity and even vulgarity which, if for James an obvious rhetorical tactic, appears for Roosevelt to have been an abiding and much-relished personal impulse. Roosevelt's bluster and brag were increasingly offensive to later generations which had abandoned the big words and the manly virtues. By 1931, Henry Pringle's brilliant and devastating biography seemed permanently to diminish Roosevelt's place in history.

The new edition of Roosevelt's letters provides documentation for all Henry Pringle's astringencies about the man. There is the intolerable rhetoric of manliness: the praise for the rough, the virile, the clean-living, the constant desire to administer a "sound drubbing" to the "cowardly" and the "sentimental." "If we ever come to nothing as a nation it will be because the teaching of Carl Schurz, President Eliot, the *Evening Post* and the futile sentimentalists of the international arbitration type, bears its legitimate fruit in producing a flabby, timid type of character, which eats away the great fighting features of our race."

This is all, of course, very funny, and it reaches its strident and supposedly hilarious climax at San Juan Hill. Yet it must be remembered that the Spanish were not shooting blank cartridges in Cuba, that men were killed, and that Roosevelt at least had the courage to apply his doctrine of the "strenuous life" to himself. And when Mr. Dooley suggested that Roosevelt's book *The Rough Riders* should have been called *Alone in Cubia* or *Th' Biography iv a Hero be Wan who Knows,* Roosevelt could hardly have been more disarming. I "regret to state," he wrote Finley Peter Dunne, "that my family and intimate friends are delighted with your review of my book."

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These Roosevelt letters remind us vividly of the exuberance, the inextinguishable vitality, and the keen, animal instinct of the man. He was, of course, voracious in his interests; except for Jefferson, no American president has ever known so much, read so widely, or dogmatized so freely in so fantastic a variety of fields. If his opinions of Henry James seem cheap and stupid today, how many active politicians, then or now, have read Henry James at all? And the more striking thing is the number of new men and ideas Theodore Roosevelt recognized and encouraged. He instantly perceived the importance of Mahan on the influence of sea power in history; he sensed, less sharply, that of Turner on the frontier. He singled out the bright young men of the day: William Allen White, Jacob Riis and Lincoln Steffens were his friends; Stephen Crane dined with him; he entertained Hamlin Garland in Washington, introducing him to Brooks Adams and Cabot Lodge; he responded, coarsely but positively, to a whole range of new sensations, from Tolstoy (reading *Anna Karenina* on a western trip in between rounding up cattle thieves) to Professor Langley's flying machine.

More important was his sense for the grand movements of the time. He had no original ideas; but his instinct for historical tendencies

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drove him to seize upon the big issues. His letters in these two volumes show him edging into the trust agitation, scenting the unrest and knowing that something had to be done. Even more striking is his understanding that the days of American isolation were over, that the U.S. was irrevocably condemned to competition among the great world powers. The Germans and, in the longer perspective, the Russians stood athwart his conception of American interests. "I look upon them," he wrote in 1897 of the Russians, "as a people . . . with a great future, as we have; but a people with poisons working in it." If Russia continues in its despotic way, "she may put off the day of reckoning; but she cannot ultimately avert it, and instead of occasionally having to go through what Kansas has gone through with the populists she will sometime experience a red terror which will make the French Revolution pale." And he understood too the new strategic significance of the Pacific; if Russia "ever does take possession of Northern China and drill the Northern Chinese to serve as her Army, she will indeed be a formidable power."

America could not last in this dangerous new world, Roosevelt felt, so long as bourgeois timidity and avarice prevailed over the martial qualities indispensable for survival. Here, again, he called for a triumph of will. If he could rebuild his own body by personal moral determination, could not the nation be restored by an invocation of the "strenuous life"? In the end, he was a moralist in politics, a great political educator, and, though his significant career lay largely beyond the two volumes under review, we can see in these letters the essential stirrings of preparation.

The two volumes, it should be added, are a triumph of the editorial art. The notes of identification are compact, discreet and often witty; and the essays on Roosevelt by Elting E. Morison and John M. Blum have a penetration and detachment which put them in the same class with the brilliant earlier essays by Stuart P. Sherman and Richard Hofstadter. The only failure is the index, which for some reason does not list all proper names mentioned in the letters and therefore will be much less useful than an index should be.

Out of these volumes emerges above all a pragmatist's sense of the power of will. T.R. and William James never had much personal contact. Roosevelt's political and historical interests and his active dislike of business domination drew him much more to Henry and Brooks Adams. James, it is true, had been Roosevelt's anatomy instructor at Harvard (where, a classmate later recalled, "T.R. *always* had the last word"); but the two men later differed bitterly over the policy of

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expansionism. Yet in 1905 James supported Roosevelt for the presidency of Harvard. "Think of the mighty good will of him," he wrote, "of his enjoyment of his post, of his power as a preacher, of the number of things to which he gives his attention, of the safety of his second thoughts, of the increased courage he is showing, and above all of the fact that he is an open, instead of an underground leader. . . . Bless him—and damn all his detractors!"

"Anaesthesia," James wrote on another occasion, "is the watchword of the moral sceptic. . . . *Energy* is that of the moralist. Act on my creed, cries the latter, and the results of your action will prove the creed true." In this sense, Theodore Roosevelt was the pragmatist in politics (as, in the sense of the word favored by the followers of Robert M. Hutchins, he was doubtless the "pragmatist" in diplomacy—Panama—and the "pragmatist" in reform). The volcanic Rooseveltian energy performed a magnificent service in its day. "Thousands of innocent magazine readers," said James in 1882, "lie paralyzed and terrified in the network of shallow negations which the leaders of opinion have thrown over their souls. All they need to be free and hearty again in the exercise of their birthright is that these fastidious vetoes should be swept away. All that the human heart wants is its chance." In his brawling and offensive way, Theodore Roosevelt swept away many fastidious vetoes. The human heart in America, on the whole, benefited from his violent energy, though T.R., for whom energy became almost an end in itself, concluded as his own major casualty.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

THE SHADOW BEFORE

THE AGE OF LONGING. By Arthur Koestler. Macmillan. $3.50.

Even in the nineteenth century, an era of hope and expectation, there were premonitory voices like Dostoevsky's and Kierkegaard's foreshadowing an age of anguish. By the end of the first quarter of the present century, writing in 1922 in the hour of France's victory and dominance, Paul Valéry could not shake off foreboding:

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The storm [he wrote] has ended, yet we are still restless and full of care. . . . We have only vague hopes, but clear fears. . . . We are aware that the charm of life and its abundance are behind us. . . . There is no thinking man who can hope to master this concern, or avoid the darkness, or even estimate the probable period of deepgoing disturbance. . . . All the foundations of our world have been shaken. . . . Something more essential has worn out than the replaceable parts of a machine. . . .

Since that was written, Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin have shown Europe the terrifying spectacle of the uprising of the inner barbarian, led by the new Man-of-Power, by "Genghiz Khan equipped with the telegraph" . . . and the atomic bomb. Among Europe's intellectuals there is a growing conviction that Europe itself is doomed. The "longing" in Koestler's title is despairing, unassuageable longing, longing with nothing to base itself on, longing without hope or expectation.

Thus it would seem that, alongside the Arthur Koestler who forms committees to do battle for cultural freedom, there is another Koestler who nudges the elbow of the first into the automatic writing of a message that fills the "cultural freedom" Koestler with astonishment and fear.

If the two Koestlers were in dialogue with each other, the novel would have possessed more tension. But *The Age of Longing* is more like a monologue of the despairing Koestler without the responses of the fighting Koestler, a monologue the fragments of which are distributed with fair impartiality among all the characters of the book.

As the "thesis" has the air of having been carefully distributed, proposition by proposition, among the personages, so the personages themselves have the appearance of lay figures especially constructed to present and represent their portions of the thesis. There is Monsieur Anatole, old and dying, with his tired last sparks of *esprit,* his tenuous recollections of the heroic days when the Paris mob stormed the Bastille, his attenuating lecherous memories of the escapades in which he earned his cyrrhosis of the liver and swollen prostate. He longs for a "continuity" that is about to be broken by his death and the death of the France he represents. There is Hydie Anderson, American girl who longs for the lost religious faith of her adolescence, vainly seeking a surrogate in an affair with the Russian "cultural attaché" and police agent, Nikitin, whose faith attracts her by its appearance of being monolithic and indestructible. There is her father, Colonel Anderson, "confused liberal" from the United States, busy making a list of the 2,000 most important French men to be flown to safety in America when the storm breaks. There are French and English demi-vierge intellectuals who have never dared to sleep with "the Revolution" but "pet" with

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her to the point of losing their purity. There are assorted refugees from the countries behind the Iron Curtain, going through the futile gestures of a resistance, the effectiveness of which they no longer believe in, unless they succeed in preserving belief through madness.

The pathos of the characters lies primarily in the mood that pervades the book, possessing all of them, a "longing" to get the inevitable over with, to submit to it with faith or at least resignation, to have all doubts dispelled, if only in the eventless peace of the cemetery. "Their faith is dead, their kingdom is dead, only the longing remains."

With one exception these characters are all seen from the outside rather than from within; their actions reducible to reflexes, their feelings to complexes, their words to propositions assigned to them by the author rather than springing from their inner being; the flashbacks into their past are like distillations in a *curriculum vitae* filled out for some bureaucratic purpose. The one exception is instructive, for it is the personage whose fate the author has felt most personally—that of the Soviet "Hero of Culture," who finds himself suddenly freed in Paris from the straitjacket of police compulsion, because the wife he has left behind as hostage has died or committed suicide. Despite his physical escape from compulsion, he too is under the spell of a dying world, and his longing to write the "one truthful and great book of his life" ends in impotent failure.

It is this unity of mood, a unity of lack of hope and lack of will, that gives the book its impact and sets its limitations upon that impact. There are moments when the characters hover on the edge of independent life, when their movements come close to the compulsive and obsessive actions of figures whose compulsions come from within; when the easily recognizable figures of this *roman à clef* arouse the author's distaste sufficiently for distaste to turn to anger and parody to satire. But when one puts down the book in which interest has never flagged, the feeling remains that one's interest has been held primarily by the fact that this is our time, these our cares and preoccupations, the men we know, argue with, mock at, feel sorry for, fear.

Bertram D. Wolfe

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RETURN FROM UTOPIA

THE BURNED BRAMBLE. By Manés Sperber. Doubleday. $3.95.

Mr. Sperber's novel, which has moved Arthur Koestler to critical comments so lyrical they scan and which has been hailed by Upton Sinclair as a modern classic, is a massive and most uneven book that somehow rises above all its manifest flaws and compels one to acknowledge it as a work of considerable force and dignity, one deserving comparison with Koestler's own best books, with George Orwell's, with Lionel Trilling's *The Middle of the Journey,* and with Victor Serge's fine, neglected novel, *The Case of Comrade Tulayev.* As a work of the imagination, it has, or seems to have, few of the merits we associate with those books. It is flabbily constructed, relentlessly didactic, and, to my mind, quite unsteady in direction. Sperber is writing about the world of the German Communist Party between 1931 and 1937. His German Communists, all of whom end up as ex-Communists or dead Communists, are distinguishable one from another by the nature and degree of their political commitments but not by very much else. The rest of his characters are conveniences of plot—wives for husbands, husbands for wives, torturers for torture scenes, and Peter Lorre creeps for the brief melodramas of Central European politics that are staged every so often in this fundamentally philosophical novel.

Yet, for all of that, this is a deeply affecting book. In a recent article on the literature of apostasy in the New York *Times,* Sperber pointed out that "Mitya Karamazov, according to the usual standards of fiction, is a much more interesting and better profiled figure than his brother Ivan. Yet the really important figures of what many reviewers called a badly constructed, confused, and terribly verbose novel of crime are Ivan, Father Zossima, and Alyosha." This, of course, is true, and while I am not quite prepared to say that *The Burned Bramble* is as monumental a book as *The Brothers Karamazov* (Sperber, I hasten to add, was making no such suggestion himself) it, too, triumphs over its weaknesses and is full of moral insight and eloquence. If its characters are fuzzily drawn, they are neither uninteresting nor unimportant. And even by the conventional standards, Sperber has gifts of a high order. His picture of Schuschnigg's war on the Viennese workers in 1934 is perhaps the best ever done; he renders the atmosphere of the refugee community in Prague in the late 'thirties with great skill, making it a symbol of all the refugee communities where men "quickly forget the laws of growth," where all minds see the future only as a road back to

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the past, where the normally optimistic "rent rooms by the day, the most pessimistic by the week."

But it is essentially a book which, in Sperber's words, attempts "to transmit the evolution of conscience." Others in the genre have conveyed a more coherent philosophy, a more vivid sense of the power of evil and the evil of power; but none, I think, has so forcefully conveyed the meaning and high tragedy of the Communist experience. The period Sperber is writing about was one in which as he has someone say, the revolution defeated all of its friends and none of its enemies. It was a pivotal period. At the beginning, the idea, though long since violated and fatally infected (Sperber holds it to be self-infection, but that is another matter), retained certain large elements of grace. At the end, it retained none—or at least it had become possible to perceive the grace that remained only by refusing to perceive the real world. Sperber is as much concerned with evoking the grace, the ominous grace as he sees it, of the idea as he is with studying the infection. "Of all those who have renounced the search for grandeur and permanence as expressed in terms of God, we alone," a Communist says, "have attempted to transform the conditions of humanity so drastically that

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grandeur and permanence can be realized among men." A Communist could say that in 1934 or 1935, even though he held and acknowledged the conviction that grandeur and permanence could never in fact be realized on his terms; he could say it because he also held the conviction, which was both a truth and a delusion, that it is man's effort, his reaching out for the stars beyond reach, that is the truly splendid thing in life: "All perfection unachieved has to it a measure of grandeur. This is the only grandeur available to happiness as an end. As for happiness as a means, failure is certain. Lethe water deprived of almost all its power. . . . [Everything] good that has been done in the world has been done in this attempt to achieve the unachievable. It follows that the finest use which a man can make of his life is to live as though preparing himself for an unrealizable state in which what is of dignity in him will find permanence and—who knows?—grandeur." Thus could confirmed unbelievers make themselves a new Mother Church.

The hope was sublime, and that was the trouble with it: the unprecedented grandeur of the Communist end made inevitable the unprecedented vileness of the means, which overwhelmed, and became, the end. Holding shares in a sublime vision is rather like holding shares in a rich corporation: when the vested interest is endangered, the shareholder is easily lured from the paths of righteousness. "We know exactly what's happened over there," a German Stalinist says of the Soviet Union, "but we'll save it . . . we'll hide its decadence with lies." Why? Because "the lies will become truth and the fraud will be fraud no longer . . . the crooked will be made straight once again."

Gradually, it became evident that there was nothing for the lies to save. What they loved was not in a temporary state of decay, it was already dead and stinking, and the permanence that had been achieved, without being sought after, was the permanence of death. In Sperber's metaphor, it was discovered that the bush was not simply on fire: it was already consumed. "Even the roots were burned out and became cold cinders. And once again there was darkness and cold." This bitter chill, paradoxically, rekindled the Communist conscience, and I assume that, since this is said to be the first volume in a series, its successors will go into the matter of what the ex-Communist conscience had evolved into. I hope so.

Richard H. Rovere

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THE EDUCATION OF STEPHEN SPENDER

WORLD WITHIN WORLD, the Autobiography of Stephen Spender. Harcourt Brace and Company. $3.50.

In 1929 Stephen Spender left Oxford and went to Germany to become a writer. "My own work," a quoted journal entry of that year declares, "is to write poetry and novels. I have no character or will power outside my work. In the life of action, I do everything that my friends tell me to do, and have no opinions of my own. This is shameful, I know, but it is so."

Twenty years later the situation is the same. "A middle-aged man, in the center of life and rotted by a modicum of success," Spender returns at the end of his autobiography to the truth he had already known in lonely childhood, a truth he thinks everyone should acknowledge: "that his class and nation, even the personality and character which he presents to his fellow beings are all a mask, and beneath this mask there is only the desire to love and be loved, just because he is ignorant and miserable, and surrounded by unknowns of time and space and other people . . . that under all causes and all appearances there was an extreme simplicity, like that of a lost child or a sick person."

In between it was the same, too. When Spender returned from Spain, reacting against his attempt at Communist self-righteousness, he wrote poems expressing the sense "of being isolated within my personal existence: but I tried to state the condition of the isolated self as the universal condition of all existence."

And yet during the late 'thirties and 'forties Spender made a career not of writing poetry but of having opinions. He became internationally famous as a poet-spokesman for opinions not his own and which did not express his deepest feelings. How could this be? In *World Within World* Spender tries to be very frank. He says quite truly that most people refuse to admit the elements of existence out of which they make their lives. But he is not clear what he is being frank about, despite all that he says of homosexuality and liking to see his name in the paper. At the same time that he reveals the unreality-to-self of most of his political pronouncements, he continues, even in this autobiography, to produce new political clichés which are increasingly abstract, sententious and contradictory.

The contradictions in *World Within World* parallel those in *Forward from Liberalism* of 1936. Obviously if one has no opinions of one's own, one can reflect more fully, responsively and in a certain sense sincerely the contradictions of the period. In *Forward from*

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Liberalism, "a Communist because I am a liberal," Spender criticized Russian practices from a liberal point of view in terms of what is preferable, but justified them from a Communist point of view in terms of what is necessary. "What is the final aim of party discipline? It is to teach the lessons of necessity." He criticized religious humanism for making men refuse to admit what is necessary when it does not fit into their idealist scheme.

But in his visit to the Spanish civil war, at a time when all the intellectuals were discussing Gide's *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.,* Spender discovered that Communist dogmatism and ruthlessness in action had caused the death or imprisonment of some of his friends, of people trying to be both liberals and communists at once. He had to go forward from communism as he had gone forward from liberalism. In *World Within World* the emphasis is on movement for its own sake, movement as giving a sense of life. The politics grows more and more abstract and simple. "Human beings are bound together by the energy of movements in the direction of shared ideals. The ideal is a fictitious vanishing point. . . . Strictly speaking, one never *is,* one is only moving."

Though Spender says at one point that "the 1930's saw the last of the idea that the individual, accepting his responsibilities, could alter the history of the time," Spender prefers at most points the ideas of the 'forties about individual morality to the ideas of the 'thirties about historical necessity. But Spender still has little sense of the self as character with a necessary inner pattern of acceptances and rejections. Everything is in motion. The self is not *there;* it must be repeatedly chosen, and the choice of self (who chooses it?) seems as arbitrary as the choice of opinions. There is no requiredness and nothing is really ruled out.

Despite the abstract formulations, Spender has a self, nevertheless, and though it is not expressed in his public rhetoric, it is much more socially involved than his talk of isolation and of masks and the simple need for love would suggest. This self is essentially nihilistic, most fully at home imaginatively in the decadent Germany of the early 'thirties, here described with such vivid nostalgia. Though Hamburg was a kind of destined hell of satisfied wishes, Spender says that, "nevertheless, during the year or so when I was living a life dangerous to myself and impossible to justify to others, I was writing my best early poems."

He says of a later period that indignation over the crimes of the Nazis freed him from emptiness, gave him a sense of self, of life. "At the very worst there were moments when I felt that there was a conspiratorial relationship between the evil passions of the Fascists—which I so profoundly understood—and my own anti-Fascist virulence."

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Spender's best book, in which he came closest to finding himself, and which should have been the basis of his later organic development, was *The Destructive Element,* in which he "analyzed the deep consciousness of destructive forces threatening our civilization, which was to be found in the work of Henry James, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot." The most interesting pages intellectually of *European Witness* are those in which Spender describes his emotional response to the nihilism of Goebbels' *Michael* and Ernst Juenger's *Feuer und Blut.* When he discussed this with the student Aulach, Aulach told Spender that when he wrote out of the aliveness of his real self, "you are filled with social despair, and you have no religious or political beliefs whatever. Directly, out of a sense of conscience, you try to introduce a constructive idea into your writing, you fail."

"All the same," Spender said to him dutifully and emptily, "one must look for a constructive idea. If one has the sense of despair and of evil, then one must look for the sense of hope and of good with which to confront despair and evil." But the looking was outside, was movement toward an ideal goal. It was not self-determined, it did not grow out of a real struggle with the demon inside, and it ends in this book in just what Spender thought he hated in his liberal, dutiful father. "Just as Midas turned everything he touched to gold, so my father turned everything into rhetorical abstraction, in which there was no concreteness, no accuracy." Nevertheless, Spender is franker and more honest than most. We can hardly afford now not to make the best of any attempt to "admit the elements out of which we make our lives," and in a period when the formula of moral affirmation of the self is in danger of seeming at once unrealizable and historically determined we can hardly afford not to make the best of any attempt to see what it really means to have "opinions of one's own."

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THE SACRIFICIAL ARTIST

VAN GOGH. By Meyer Schapiro. New York: H. N. Abrams. $10.00.

I can think of only one objection to this book, and that is that it is not long enough to encompass all the wealth of material and depth of insight that Professor Schapiro has accumulated on the subject of Van Gogh. Nevertheless, those readers who are familiar with Schapiro's general approach to art, or any reader who is willing to read the present text carefully, will find in these close-packed sentences a density of suggestion and an analytic detail that are extraordinary. Indeed, I would recommend the pages of comment on the particular paintings of Van Gogh as a model, *mutatis mutandis,* for critics of literature: Schapiro is dealing with the painting, and the painting only, but he brings to bear upon the aesthetic surface all his equipment of mind and imagination, with the result that each individual painting becomes a kind of window into Van Gogh's world. We have had Van Gogh dealt with as a case study before, but we have not had anything like this book, in which the very structure and texture of the artist's feelings and emotions are elicited from all the plastic details of the painting.

Since the book aims to present Van Gogh's paintings, Schapiro is not riding any general thesis about the artist's life, or the relations of genius and insanity. But his analysis of the paintings does provide us with new data in this continuing discussion of art and neurosis. Nobody after reading this book could possibly believe that Van Gogh's paintings could exist without Van Gogh's emotions, or that these emotions could have been what they were without Van Gogh's sickness and ultimate madness. The emotions establish the richness of the painting; they also limit Van Gogh seriously as an artist, as they eventually destroyed the man. No doubt, life would be much less perplexing if we had only sound, wholesome, well-rounded geniuses; but when the lightning strikes at its will, we had better accept the fact and try to understand it, rather than construct some theory that would legislate it out of existence.

For a study of Van Gogh that complements Schapiro's the reader may find it interesting to look up a recent essay by Heidegger (in his volume *Holzwege*), which deals with one of Van Gogh's paintings as the artist's entrance into the Truth of Being. This is the other side of the coin from Schapiro's excellent psychologizing.

William Barrett

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